

**Frequently Asked Questions & Answers for Wisconsin State Employees
Regarding Preparation for Potential Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic**

Note: This document contains answers to frequently asked questions for state employees and was prepared by the Wisconsin Department of Administration in collaboration with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. If a pandemic occurs, more specific direction will be developed to reflect the appropriate practices based on the severity of the particular virus and the duration of the pandemic. Responses below are in accordance with applicable collective bargaining agreements or state administrative code. If you have additional questions, please ask your supervisor.

Section A: General Information about COVID-19 for Employees		
<u>Questions</u>		<u>Answers</u>
1.	What is the novel coronavirus?	A novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified. The virus causing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), is not the same as the coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans and cause mild illness, like the common cold.
2.	Why is the disease now being called COVID-19?	<p>On February 11, 2020 the World Health Organization announced an official name for the disease that is causing the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak, first identified in Wuhan, China. The new name of this disease is coronavirus disease 2019, abbreviated as COVID-19. In COVID-19, ‘CO’ stands for ‘corona,’ ‘VI’ for ‘virus,’ and ‘D’ for disease. Formerly, this disease was referred to as “2019 novel coronavirus” or “2019-nCoV”.</p> <p>There are many types of human coronaviruses including some that commonly cause mild upper-respiratory tract illnesses. COVID-19 is a new disease, caused by a novel (or new) coronavirus that has not previously been seen in humans.</p>
3.	How does COVID-19 spread?	<p>COVID-19 is a new disease and the CDC is still learning how it spreads, the severity of illness it causes, and to what extent it may spread in the United States. Currently, the virus is thought to spread mainly from person to person as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet). • Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. • These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. • People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest). • Some spread might be possible before people show symptoms; there have been reports of this occurring with this new coronavirus, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. • It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

4.	For what symptoms should I be monitoring?	COVID-19 presents with flu-like symptoms (fever, cough or sore throat, headache or body aches, and in some cases diarrhea and vomiting) or acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath).
5.	What is my risk of exposure?	At this time, most U.S. workers remain at low risk of exposure. According to the United States Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration, at this time, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) emphasizes that, while the novel coronavirus, COVID-19 poses a potentially serious public health threat, the risk to individuals is dependent on exposure. For most people in the United States, including most types of workers, the risk of infection with COVID-19 is currently low.
6.	Who is most at risk of having complications from COVID-19?	Elderly people with chronic conditions are currently the most at risk from complications from COVID-19. Given the vulnerable populations within the State's care, careful adherence to guidelines issued by Wisconsin Public Health, supervisors, and human resources is essential. Employees with flu-like symptoms need to stay home.
7.	What can I do to limit my risk and help prevent of influenza and viruses like COVID-19?	The CDC advises that the best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19. There are simple everyday actions everyone can take to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid close contact with people who are sick. • Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. • Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. • Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
8.	What can I do to best limit risk to my family?	More information is provided on the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) website, specifically: COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions
9.	What should I do if I'm experiencing flu-like symptoms?	Employees who are sick are encouraged to stay home. According to the CDC , employees who have flu-like symptoms or symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever, signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants). Employees should follow their work unit's sick leave notification procedures, including notifying their supervisor and staying home if they are sick. If you think you have been exposed to COVID-19 and develop a fever and/or symptoms of respiratory illness, such as a cough or difficulty breathing, call your healthcare provider immediately BEFORE going to the clinic or emergency room.
10.	Are the procedures different if I am a health care provider (or if I work in a health care setting)?	Employees who regularly work in health care settings, including health care providers, support staff, and security staff, must remain home until they are symptom-free for 24 hours. The CDC has provided additional guidance for health care providers who provide direct patients with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 .

11.	What should I do if I recently traveled internationally?	<p>Employees returning from a CDC Level 3 travel advisory area (South Korea, China, Italy, or Iran), may not return to the workplace for 14 days. To protect the community, employees are strongly encouraged to self-quarantine for 14 days and monitor for symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath) during this time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For those returning from any location under a Level 2 CDC Travel Health Notice, employees are advised to self-monitor for 14 days for symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath). • If this happens, employees should notify their supervisor and/or local HR that they will not be into work. • For more information, see the CDC's guidance on prevention and treatment. <p>If you become sick with COVID-19 following travel, in addition to the information provided by your healthcare provider, here are steps to take when you are sick.</p>
12.	What if I have COVID-19 or have a family member with it?	<p>Employees who are sick with COVID-19 or suspect they are infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 should follow the steps identified by the CDC to help prevent the disease from spreading to people in your home and community. Employees may not return to work until they are fever-free and all other symptoms have passed. Contact the DHS Division of Public Health or your local health department for more information.</p> <p>The CDC recommends employees who are well but who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 should notify their supervisor and refer to CDC guidance for how to conduct a risk assessment of their potential exposure.</p>
13.	I have travel plans with my family for Spring Break. Is there any guidance about how to prepare for international travel?	<p>The CDC advises the following steps before traveling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check the CDC's Traveler's Health Notices for the latest guidance and recommendations for each country to which you will travel. More travel information can be found on the CDC website. • If employees have upcoming international travel plans for either Spring Break or other business-related reasons, it is advisable to reconsider them. There could be substantial travel delays and/or new restrictions, along with possible prolonged isolation when you return home, with significant impact on your personal and professional plans. • Check yourself and travel companions for symptoms of acute respiratory illness before starting travel and notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick. • If traveling outside the United States, sick employees should follow their health plan's policy for obtaining medical care or contact a healthcare provider or overseas medical assistance company to assist them with finding an appropriate healthcare provider in that country. A U.S. consular officer can help locate healthcare services. However, U.S. embassies, consulates, and military facilities do not have the legal authority, capability, and resources to evacuate or give medicines, vaccines, or medical care to private U.S. citizens overseas.
14.	Where can I learn more information?	Additional up-to-date resources and information about COVID-19 can be found here:

- [Wisconsin Department of Health Services](#)
- [Wisconsin DHS COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [United States Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#)
- [United States Department of State](#)
- [Public Health Madison Dane County](#)

Section B: Reporting to Work

General Policy: Employees are expected to report to work as assigned unless directed otherwise by their agencies, Executive Order of the Governor, or other appropriate authority.

1.	I am worried about being exposed to the coronavirus at work. Should I still report to work, and will I be protected?	Employees should continue to report to work unless directed otherwise as reflected in the General Policy above. As state employees, we have obligations to maintain services to the extent possible during an emergency. We will be making every effort to reduce exposure in our workplaces.
2.	Will I know if someone at work has COVID-19?	If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, agencies will inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Employees exposed to a co-worker with confirmed COVID-19 should refer to CDC guidance for how to conduct a risk assessment of their potential exposure.
3.	Am I subject to disciplinary action if I refuse to come to work?	Employees who fail to come to work in a pandemic will be treated just as if they failed to come to work at any other time and may be subject to disciplinary action.
4.	May I use vacation leave, sick leave, or any other type of leave in order to avoid working during a pandemic?	Employees may request leave time and it will be reviewed, and approved or denied, in accordance with the leave provisions of their contract or state administrative code. In general, our objective is to ensure the health and safety of our state employees while continuing the State's critical services. At this time, our goal is to encourage employees to report to work. However, based on the virulence of the virus and depending on recommendations from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, discretionary leaves (i.e., non-mandatory leaves) may be considered. While an employee may use any available leave balance when ill, sick leave is generally only available for an employee's illness or that of their immediate family.
5.	Who is included in the definition of "immediate family"?	"Immediate family" means: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents, step-parents, grandparents, foster parents, children, step-children, grandchildren, foster children, brothers and their spouses, sisters and their spouses, of the employee or spouse; • The spouse;

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aunts and uncles, sons-in-law or daughters-in-law of the employee or spouse; and • Other relatives of the employee or spouse providing they reside in the same household of the employee.
6.	If my job requires me to work with the public, should I continue to come to work?	Yes, unless directed not to come to work. The State will make efforts to provide the appropriate protective measures to employees assigned to work in a situation that would put them at greater risk of exposure than the typical interactions encountered in conducting usual life activities. These measures include increased hygiene measures, personal protective equipment, social distancing measures, or physical barriers.
7.	If I am exposed to the COVID-19 virus on the job and become ill, am I eligible for Workers Compensation benefits?	The COVID-19 virus, like Influenza, would most likely not be compensable under Wisconsin Workers Compensation, as it would be very difficult to determine where and when an employee was exposed to the influenza virus.
8.	What if I am assigned to perform work that isn't normally part of my position, either in my own agency or somewhere else? Can I refuse the assignment?	In times of emergency, we all need to remain flexible to get the work done. It is likely that employees may be asked to do work outside their normal duties. As the effects of a pandemic are realized in Wisconsin, state employees should anticipate that they may be required to assist in performing work for absent or ill co-workers or ensure that the State is able to provide essential services.
9.	Can I refuse an assignment that would put me at greater risk of being exposed to the COVID-19 virus?	No, employees must work as assigned unless granted leave. As the effects of a pandemic are realized in Wisconsin, state employees should anticipate that they may be required to assist in performing work for absent or ill co-workers to ensure that the State is able to provide essential services. The State will make an effort to provide the appropriate protective measures to employees assigned to work in a situation that would put them at greater risk of exposure than the typical interactions encountered in conducting usual life activities. These measures include increased hygiene measures, personal protective equipment, social distancing measures, or physical barriers.
10.	What is social distancing? Will the State implement social distancing in the workplace?	Social distancing measures are measures intended to reduce the spread of a pandemic respiratory virus by reducing direct contact between individuals. Social distancing measures may include minimization of face-to-face meetings, staggered work hours and days, temporary work from home arrangements, spacing of work areas, physical barriers between individuals, or other similar practices. Agencies may begin implementing social distancing measures in their respective agencies/buildings at their discretion.
11.	What should I do if I believe I may have the COVID-19 virus?	Minimizing the spread of the virus is critical. Employees who are ill should contact their supervisor to report their illness. Employees should not report to work if they believe they are ill. Use of sick or other paid or unpaid leave will be handled pursuant to existing policies, state administrative code, and applicable collective bargaining agreements. Employees should also contact their health provider or local health department.
12.	What if I have been directly exposed to the COVID-19 virus but do not have symptoms?	Depending on the circumstances presented by the particular respiratory virus, employees who have been directly exposed to the virus through actions such as caring for an ill family member may choose to remain at home for a period to ensure they do not carry the virus into the workplace.

		Documentation of exposure may be required and employees choosing to remain home will be required to use available leave. Employees should also contact their health provider or local health department.
13.	What if I have been exposed to an individual who has been quarantined?	Individuals who have been quarantined are not ill; they have had contact with an infected person and must remain at home until it is clear whether they become ill or not. Thus, exposure to a quarantined person may not mean any exposure at all to the virus. Employees who have been directly exposed to the virus through actions such as caring for a family member who was isolated due to illness at that time (or was subsequently isolated) may choose to remain at home for a period to ensure they do not carry the virus into the workplace. Documentation of exposure may be required and employees choosing to remain home will be required to use available leave.
14.	If I have traveled to a location where there are confirmed cases of COVID-19, may I return to work immediately?	Employees who are not exhibiting flu-like symptoms, may return to work. Please be aware that agency policies may vary depending on the nature of your job. However, if you traveled to or from a level 2 or 3 country, you may need to self-monitor or to self-quarantine. Refer to Question 11 in Section A for more information.
15.	Can my Employer send me home if I have been exposed to the COVID-19 virus but choose to work?	Employees will not normally be sent home unless exhibiting significant flu-like symptoms. Employees who are sent home will be required to use available leave balances. Employees who have been exposed to COVID-19 remain at home until the 14 days for self-monitoring have passed and the employee is symptom free.
16.	What if I believe a co-worker has the COVID-19 virus or has been exposed to it?	Employee concerns should be discussed with their supervisor or someone in Human Resources. Despite these concerns, employees will be expected to report to work as directed.
17.	Will the State develop policies and procedures for what state agencies should do if someone becomes ill at work?	Yes, employees may be sent home using appropriate protocols recommended by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Employees who are sent home will be required to use available leave balances.
18.	What if I am in a group considered to be a "high risk" (i.e., I have a chronic health condition which makes me more susceptible to the COVID-19 virus) and for which authorities are recommending staying at home?	Employees who provide a detailed letter from their medical practitioner may use personal paid or unpaid leave. Sick leave is available only as currently provided in state administrative code or collective bargaining agreements, which typically limit use to periods of actual sickness. See question B.4., above, regarding leave requests.

Section C: Use of Sick Leave and Family & Medical Leave Act (FMLA) Leave

General Policy: Discretionary leave may be limited. Use of sick leave or FMLA-qualifying leave will be administered in accordance with existing labor agreements and state administrative code, unless application of leave provisions are modified by Executive Order of the Governor or the federal government.

1.	Is pandemic influenza or COVID-19 an FMLA qualifying condition and will I be able to use FMLA leave?	While influenza is generally not covered by FMLA, complications arising from influenza or COVID-19 may qualify for FMLA leave in relation to the employee's own illness or the illness of a qualifying family member. The usual medical documentation may be required.
2.	What if my children's school or day care provider is closed and I have no one else to take care of the kids?	Employees may request to use vacation, personal holiday, comp time, or leave without pay. Documentation may be required. Employees should contact their agency payroll office regarding the possible consequences of using leave without pay. See question A.3., above, regarding leave requests.
3.	What if members of my family are sick?	Use of sick leave, FMLA leave, or other discretionary leave will be administered in accordance with applicable labor agreements and state administrative code. Use of discretionary leave may be limited. See question B.4., above, regarding leave requests.
4.	What if members of my family who <i>do not</i> live in the same household as me are sick? May I stay home to care for them?	Use of sick leave, FMLA leave, or other discretionary leave will be administered in accordance with applicable labor agreements and state administrative code. Use of discretionary leave may be limited. See question B.4., above, regarding leave requests.