



Social Security Administration (SSA)

COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan 2.0

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Introduction

We are updating the October 26, 2021 Workplace Safety Plan (WSP) to incorporate the latest guidance from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) on [protecting workers](#). This update—WSP 2.0—complies with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Memorandum M-21-15, [Safer Federal Workplace: Agency Model Safety Principles \(last updated September 13, 2021\)](#) as modified by OMB Memorandum M-21-25, [Integrating Planning for A Safe Increased Return of Federal Employees and Work Environment](#), and the President’s Executive Order (EO) 13991, [Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask-Wearing](#). We will comply with all applicable court orders, including by following relevant OMB and Safer Federal Workforce Task Force [guidance](#) on EO 14042 Ensuring Adequate COVID Safety Protocols for Federal Contractors and [guidance](#) on EO 14043, Requiring Coronavirus Disease 2019 Vaccination for Federal Employees.

As noted in the October 26, 2021 WSP, this plan is a living document, which we update to align with the most current CDC and OMB updates and mission needs. Additionally, we will continue to communicate updates to our employees via Commissioner Broadcasts or our Human Resources Internal Communications (HRIC) and to the public [on our website](#). This update is being implemented upon satisfaction of applicable labor obligations with labor unions representing our employees. We respect the important role of our labor unions and are committed to communicating regularly with employee representatives on workplace safety matters. We will also continue to consult with our stakeholders including Congress, and advocates, as appropriate.

For additional details on our COVID-19 pandemic policies, employees and managers may visit our [internal COVID-19 website](#), which includes Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for managers and employees. The public can find detailed information about how we are operating during the pandemic by [visiting our COVID-19 webpage](#).

Workplace Safety Plan

Health and Safety

We communicate all safety policies to employees via email, and managers remind employees of these policies during regularly scheduled staff meetings. We maintain a COVID-19 intranet site with Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for managers and employees. Signage explaining our safety measures are prominently displayed in all buildings used by our employees, visitors, and onsite contractor staff. We explain our safety policies when we arrange appointments with members of the public. Our plan is available to the public on [our website](#). Security guards will ensure the public complies with posted safety measures. We have communicated our safety measures to contractors via email and in updated contract language.

Vaccination

To ensure compliance with a preliminary nationwide injunction prohibiting implementation and enforcement of the vaccination requirement for the Federal workforce, see Human Resources Internal Communication (HRIC) issued January 24, 2022: Federal Employee COVID-19 Vaccination Mandate - Update | Employee Dashboard (ssa.gov), the agency will take no action to implement or enforce COVID-19 vaccination at this time. However, employees may be asked for their vaccination status documentation and should follow all the safety protocols for the unvaccinated if they do not provide documentation of being vaccinated.

Employees

Safety protocol guidance issued by the [Safer Federal Workforce Task Force](#) applies to all employees. Employees must provide documentation of being [fully vaccinated](#) or will be considered unvaccinated for the purposes of agency safety protocols. In the [Human Resources Internal Communications](#) and the agency's [Vaccination Status Portal](#), employees receive detailed information about how to document their vaccination status, including the Privacy Act requirements and the requirement to certify under penalty of perjury that the information they submit is true and correct.

The agency grants leave-eligible employees up to 4 hours of administrative leave per dose, including for a booster, or to accompany a family member (as defined in OPM's leave regulations, see 5 CFR 630.201) who is receiving any COVID-19 vaccination dose.

- The agency grants leave-eligible employees up to four hours of administrative leave per dose—for example, up to a total of twelve hours of leave for a family member receiving three doses—for each family member the employee accompanies.
- If an employee needs to spend less time accompanying a family member who is receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, the agency grants only the needed amount of administrative leave.
- Employees should obtain advance approval from their supervisor before being permitted to use administrative leave for COVID-19 vaccination purposes.
- Employees are not credited with administrative leave or overtime work for time spent outside their tour of duty helping a family member get vaccinated.
- This policy applies to covered vaccinations received after July 29, 2021.

The agency grants up to 2 workdays of administrative leave if an employee has an adverse reaction to any COVID-19 vaccination dose that prevents the employee from working (i.e., no more than 2 workdays for reactions associated with a single dose). The employee may take other appropriate leave (e.g., sick leave) to cover any additional absence.

IMPORTANT: All previously submitted exceptions to the COVID-19 vaccination requirement will be held in abeyance. Managers should notify employees with pending exception requests that implementation or enforcement of the COVID-19 vaccination requirement pursuant to EO 14043 is currently enjoined and that an exception request therefore is not necessary so long as the nationwide injunction is in place.

Vaccination for New Employees

New employees should be prepared to provide vaccination documentation as soon as their first day of employment. Employees who do not provide documentation will be considered unvaccinated for the purpose of safety protocols.

Contractors

Given the different safety protocols for individuals who are fully vaccinated and those who are not fully vaccinated, SSA will ask about the vaccination status of onsite contractor employees who are not yet contractually required to be vaccinated. These contractor employees must attest to the truthfulness of the response they provide. For contractor employees not yet subject to a contractual requirement to be vaccinated, SSA has provided contractors with electronic access to complete the [Certification of Vaccination form](#) prior to arrival at an SSA facility. When a contractor employee discloses that they are not fully vaccinated or declines to provide information on their vaccination status, SSA will treat that individual as not fully vaccinated for purposes of implementing safety measures, including with respect to mask wearing and physical distancing.

Onsite contractor employees who are not fully vaccinated, or who decline to provide information about their vaccination status, must provide proof of a negative COVID-19 result from an FDA-approved test within the 3 days prior to entering an SSA facility. Contractor employees who do not attest to being fully vaccinated (or who decline to respond to an attestation request), and who lack the required negative test result, will not be permitted into the facility. Contractor employees who are not fully vaccinated, and who are admitted to an SSA facility, must follow the safety protocols described in the “Face Mask and Physical Distancing” section listed below.

Visitors

Given the different safety protocols for individuals who are fully vaccinated and those who are not fully vaccinated, SSA will ask about the vaccination status of visitors to SSA facilities who are not seeking a public service or benefit. Individuals must attest to the truthfulness of the response they provide. SSA provides visitors with the [Certification of Vaccination form](#) when they enter an SSA facility.

Visitors to SSA facilities who are not fully vaccinated or who decline to provide information about their vaccination status must provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test within the 3 days prior to entering an SSA facility. Visitors who do not attest to being fully vaccinated or who decline to respond, and who lack the required negative test result, will not be permitted into the facility. Visitors who are not fully vaccinated, and who are admitted to an SSA facility, must follow the safety protocols described in the “Face Mask and Physical Distancing” section listed below.

Individuals seeking a public service or benefit (and their companions)

Requirements related to vaccination status, and COVID-19 testing and results, do not apply to members of the public entering an SSA facility to obtain a public service or benefit, including Social Security field offices and hearings offices. If they are not fully vaccinated, these individuals must comply with all relevant CDC guidance, including wearing a mask and physically distancing from other people.

Telework and Remote Work

SSA will utilize telework consistent with agency policies as articulated in the [Personnel Policy Manual](#), and applicable collective bargaining agreements. Onsite work includes both portable and non-portable workloads.

COVID-19 Coordination Teams

The Office of the Commissioner will continue to provide oversight and coordination in accordance with OMB [M-21-15](#) and OMB [M-21-25](#) guidance. The COVID-19 Coordination Team is a cross-agency team consisting of executives and staff from human resources, medical, legal, program operations, facilities, and health and safety experts. The team will meet regularly as necessary to review compliance with agency COVID-19 workplace safety plans and protocols, consider potential revisions to agency COVID-19 workplace safety plans and protocols pursuant to guidance from the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force and the most up-to-date CDC guidelines, and evaluate any other operational needs related to COVID-19 workplace safety. The Team consults regularly with the Senior Procurement Executive and considers input from Facility Security Committees. We will continue to consult with experts in other agencies including the CDC and General Services Administration (GSA).

Face Masks and Physical Distancing

All SSA employees, contractors, visitors, and members of the public will be required to wear masks, regardless of their asserted vaccination status, except where contrary to law or addressed under the relevant reentry MOU.

SSA will notify individuals of the following safety measures through signage in SSA facilities and on the SSA webpage.

Vaccinated Individuals

Fully vaccinated employees generally do not need to physically distance, except where required by Federal, State, local, Tribal, or territorial laws, rules, or regulations.

Not Fully Vaccinated Individuals (or who decline to disclose vaccination status)

Employees, contractor employees, and visitors, who are not fully vaccinated (or who decline to provide vaccination status) and all individuals seeking a public benefit or service who are admitted to an SSA facility must maintain a distance of at least six feet from others at all times and wear a mask, except where prohibited by Federal, State, local, Tribal, or territorial laws, rules, or regulations.

Mask Guidelines

For individuals who are required to wear a mask:

- Appropriate masks will be worn consistently and correctly (over mouth and nose). [CDC recommends](#) the following: disposable masks, masks that fit properly (snugly around the nose and chin with no large gaps around the sides of the face), masks made with breathable fabric (such as cotton), masks made with tightly woven fabric (i.e., fabrics that do not let light pass through when held up to a light source), masks with two or three layers, and masks with inner filter pockets. SSA will not allow novelty or non-protective masks, masks with ventilation valves, or face shields as a substitute for masks.
- SSA will provide exceptions consistent with CDC guidelines, including, but not limited to, when an individual is alone in an office with floor to ceiling walls and a closed door, or for a limited time when eating or drinking and maintaining distancing in accordance with CDC guidelines.

Exceptions to the Face Mask Policy

Exceptions to the face mask policy include visitors or individuals seeking a public benefit or service under 2 years old. When scheduling the appointment, if the visitor or individual seeking a public benefit or service is required to wear a face mask pursuant to agency protocols but reports being unable to wear a face mask, management will make alternative service plans (e.g., telephone service, contactless document drop off) and consult with the Medical Office (MO) for guidance, as necessary.

Masked individuals may be asked to lower their masks briefly for identification purposes in compliance with safety and security requirements.

If an employee reports being unable to wear a face mask due to a medical or religious reason, the manager will review the instructions in the management COVID-19 FAQ and engage in the reasonable accommodation process.

Testing

After a workplace exposure, SSA will refer employees to [Community-based Testing Sites for COVID-19](#) for testing. Employees will be tested on duty time at no cost to the employee. Employees and contractor employees who are fully vaccinated and have had close contact with someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 will get tested 5-7 days after exposure, even if they do not have symptoms.

Contact Tracing

In coordination with the COVID-19 Coordination Team, our MO receives reports of possible in-office exposures and directs management about next steps including enhanced cleaning and notifications, when applicable. The MO will continue to work with public health departments concerning contact tracing and will work with management to issue notifications, when appropriate. With any notification, we protect the confidentiality of personal medical information consistent with Federal, State, and local privacy and confidentiality laws and regulations.

Travel

SSA employees will adhere strictly to [CDC guidelines](#) before, during, and after travel.

The agency has made employees aware through a FAQ that official or personal travel may result in a mandatory quarantine before they are allowed to return to the workplace. Employees may be allowed to telework, provided with weather and safety leave if they traveled for official reasons and portable work is not available, or request personal leave if they traveled for personal reasons and portable work is not available. If an employee refuses to quarantine or refuses to take personal leave while under mandatory quarantine after personal travel, SSA may elect to bar the employee from the workplace for the safety of others.

For employees who are fully vaccinated, there are no Government-wide restrictions on travel (although internal [SSA travel policies](#) still apply).

For employees who are not fully vaccinated or decline to provide information on their vaccination status, SSA will observe the following guidance, unless it is contrary to an accommodation to which an employee is legally entitled. Official domestic travel for such employees should be limited to only necessary mission-critical trips and must be approved by the employee's Deputy Commissioner. This authority is further delegable to Associate Commissioners and Regional Commissioners. International travel should also be avoided, if at all possible, unless it is mission critical, and must be approved by the Chief of Staff. The cost of testing required for official travel can be claimed in a travel voucher as a Miscellaneous Expense under agency travel policies.

Meetings, Events, and Conferences

SSA will avoid hosting in-person meetings, conferences, or events that will be attended by more than 50 participants, unless the event is mission-critical for the public benefit (e.g., enumeration, disaster relief). When unavoidable, regardless of whether participants include members of the public, the Commissioner, in consultation with the COVID-19 Coordination Team, must approve the event. The Chief of Staff or designee must approve an SSA employee's attendance at a conference attended by more than 50 individuals.

In-person attendees at any meetings, conferences, and events hosted by SSA, regardless of size, must be asked to provide information about vaccination status. In requesting this information, SSA will comply with any applicable Federal laws, including requirements under the Privacy Act and the Paperwork Reduction Act. In-person attendees who are not fully vaccinated or decline to provide information about their vaccination status must provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test completed no later than the previous 3 days and comply with masking and physical distancing requirements for individuals who are not fully vaccinated consistent with the requirements for visitors in the Face Masks and Physical Distancing section above.

Individuals who fail to comply with these requirements may not be permitted to attend. In-person attendees must wear a mask in public indoor settings regardless of vaccination status.

Symptom Monitoring and Screening

If SSA employees, contractor employees, visitors, or individuals seeking a public service or benefit have [symptoms consistent with COVID-19](#), they will not enter an SSA facility. They will also be required to screen for exposures and comply with any CDC guidance related to quarantines or testing after travel.

SSA employees and contractor employees working onsite will regularly complete self-screening. Visitors and individuals seeking a public service or benefit will be asked to follow posted signage to complete symptom screening before entering an SSA facility.

Any individual, regardless of vaccination status, who develops any symptoms consistent with COVID-19 during the workday must immediately isolate, notify a supervisor, and promptly leave the workplace. Supervisors may contact the MO for advice.

Quarantine, Isolation and Steps Following Exposure to Someone with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19

Any individual with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 will be advised to isolate, pursuant to CDC guidelines.

Employees and contractor employees who have had a close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 will follow [CDC](#) and State, local, and Tribal guidance for quarantine.

If an employee is subject to isolation due to being infected with COVID-19 and is unable to telework, the employee may request personal leave (e.g., sick leave, annual leave, credit hours).

Confidentiality and Privacy

All medical information collected from individuals, including vaccination information, test results, and any other information obtained as a result of testing and symptom monitoring, will be treated in accordance with applicable laws and policies on confidentiality, privacy, and the security of information technology. Positive tests will be recorded for the OSHA Illness and Injury Log when appropriate. Managers may consult the MO on questions about medical information or concerns. Questions about legal authority to share medical information internally or externally may be directed to Office of the General Counsel (OGC), Office of General Law. When submitting questions to the MO or OGC, managers must exclude identifying information about individuals unless the MO or OGC requests it.

Workplace Operations

Occupancy

SSA may establish occupancy limits for specific offices as a means of facilitating physical distancing, depending on factors like vaccination status, public access, and mission requirements.

Environmental Cleaning

SSA will ensure regular cleaning of common use, high-touch, and high-density spaces, such as lobbies, restrooms, elevators, and stairwells. Office space that is in regular use will be cleaned regularly, and in accordance with CDC guidelines. Wipes and other Environmental Protection Agency-approved disinfectants will be made available for use by individuals to wipe down workstations and related personal property. Physical barriers, such as plexiglass shields, may be installed, where appropriate.

In the event of a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 in the workplace, SSA will ensure enhanced environmental cleaning of the spaces that the individual occupied or accessed in accordance with [CDC](#) and, where applicable, GSA guidance.

The Office of Budget, Finance, and Management or Office of Operations, in coordination with the COVID-19 Coordination Team and the MO, will determine the appropriate scope of workplace closures needed—in some cases, it may be a suite or individual offices or part of a floor, in other cases, it may include an entire building.

Hygiene

Hand sanitizer will be readily available throughout workspaces. Hand sanitizers will contain at least 60 percent alcohol and be manufactured in accordance with the requirements of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Ingredients will be listed on a “Drug Facts” label. SSA will ensure the hand sanitizer is not on the FDA’s do not use list.

Ventilation and Air Filtration

SSA will consider modifications to ventilation systems in accordance with [CDC guidance](#), especially as facility population density increases. To the extent feasible, indoor ventilation will be optimized to increase the proportion of outdoor air and improve filtration. SSA will consider deploying portable high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) purifiers for closed areas with public traffic like hearing rooms and higher-risk spaces.