



## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) On USDA's Response to COVID-19 Workplace Safety

Revised on April 6, 2022

The President's Management Council has asked all Federal Departments to begin the planning process for return to the physical workplace and post return to the physical workplace re-entry and post-re-entry personnel policies and work environment. As you consider the information below and, to use common terminology, please keep the following definitions in mind:

- **Re-entry:** USDA's plan for a safe, increased return of Federal employees to the workplace. USDA is using the phrase "return to the physical workplace."
- **Post re-entry:** The work environment and policies USDA will implement once we complete the re-entry process.
- **Future of work:** The longer-term impact and trends of decisions being made during there-entry period and beyond.

All our work related to re-entry, post-re-entry and future of work is guided by the following key values: trust, respect, equity, service, and inclusion. Through this process – which will actively engage our workforce and their labor unions – we aim to enhance employee engagement and morale while delivering our mission effectively, equitably, and efficiently.

USDA's Return to the Physical Workplace and COVID-19 Taskforce regularly updates these FAQs. This task force is led by the Deputy Secretary and the Assistant Secretary for Administration. Other key members are: Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Senior Advisors for COVID-19 in the Office of the Secretary, USDA's mission area Chief Operating Officers (COO), and CXOs (Chief Information Officer (CIO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO), Acting Chief Employee Experience Officer (CEEEO), Chief Acquisition Officer (CAO), as well as representatives from the Office of the General Counsel, Office of Communications, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, White House Liaison, Office of Budget and Program Analysis, and the Office of Congressional Relations.

This FAQ document will continue to evolve based on questions the Department receives from employees and supervisors, as well as input from our labor unions. If you have questions, you would like answered, which do not appear below, please send those to [futureofwork@usda.gov](mailto:futureofwork@usda.gov).

The [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP) is a helpful resource as you are navigating re-entry, post-re-entry and the future of work. EAP services are open to all USDA employees.

Finally, here are some links you may find useful:

- [Safer Federal Workforce Task Force](#)
- [Office of Personnel Management](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)



## **Topics in this FAQ:**

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- [Vaccination self-certification and safety requirements for federal contractors](#)
- [Vaccination self-certification and safety requirements for on-site visitors \(volunteers, cooperators, delivery persons, and other on-site Federal and non-Federal personnel\)](#)
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## **Returning to the physical workplace**

### **1. When are employees required to return to the physical workplace?**

On **February 28, 2022**, USDA's senior leadership cadre (Appointees, SES, SL, ST, SSTSand Senior Foreign Service Officers) returned to the physical workplace.

On **March 28th**, Agencies and Staff Offices began their phased return to the physical workplace plans to welcome back employees who do not have remote work agreements, subject to completion of labor relations obligations. Agencies and Staff Offices will be asked to fully implement these plans by **May 27, 2022, or as agreed to in labor management negotiations.**

### **2. How much notice will employees receive before having to return to the physical workplace?**

**Employees will receive notice of at least 45 calendar days.** Based on union feedback and in reviewing our collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) across agencies, we are defining ample notice to be at least 45 calendar days and up to 90 calendar days.

### **3. When can I expect to receive my notification about my eligibility for remote or telework?**

Many employees have received their notice of remote work and/or telework status and their 45-day notification of returning to office letters. Other employees will receive their notices shortly, subject to completion of labor relations obligations. This simply means agencies meet with their unions to bargain over the procedures and arrangements for implementing the DR [4080-811-002](#). Additional instructions and information will be forthcoming from each Agency CHCO or COO, and additional details about the telework and remote work policy can be found in DR [4080-811-002](#).



**4. Will the return to the physical workplace be flexible?**

**Yes.** Our agency-specific mission needs and our commitment to civil rights, equity, inclusion, and belonging will drive our planning, as will strategies for ensuring we are able to attract, recruit, retain, and galvanize top talent from across the country. USDA's phased return to the physical workplace schedule depends on 1) Agencies and Staff Offices satisfying labor relations obligations, 2) Agencies and Staff Offices providing ample notice to employees, and 3) the status of the pandemic.

**5. Is there still an occupancy limit?**

Occupancy limits are no longer in effect. However, agencies may establish occupancy limits for specific workspaces or workplaces as a means of ensuring physical distancing.

**6. If States, localities, Tribal areas, or privately-owned buildings maintain stricter mask mandates than the Federal standards, do Federal employees have to follow those standards?**

**Yes.** Federal employees who work in areas that have stricter State, local, Tribal, or mask mandates should follow those masking requirements.

**7. If States, localities, Tribal areas, or privately owned buildings maintain more lenient masking requirements than the Federal standards, must Federal employees follow the Federal masking requirements?**

**Yes.** USDA employees must follow Federal safety protocols even if the local area in which they work has more lenient standards.

**8. Do USDA employees working in foreign countries have to follow the COVID-19 safety standards established by the Chief of Mission for that country?**

**Yes.** USDA staff in foreign countries should follow all requirements established by the Chief of Mission for that country.


**Workplace safety**

**9. What should individuals do if they experience symptoms consistent with COVID-19?**


If USDA employees, onsite contractors, or visitors have COVID-19-like [symptoms](#), they should not enter the USDA workplace. Any individual with probable or confirmed COVID-19, regardless of their vaccination status, should isolate at home, consistent with CDC recommendations on [isolation](#) and workplace safety protocols. This includes people who have a [positive viral test](#) for COVID-19, regardless of whether they have symptoms, and people with symptoms of COVID-19, including people who are awaiting test results or have not been tested. People with [symptoms](#) should isolate even if they are not aware of having close contact with someone with COVID-19. Any individual who develops any symptoms consistent with COVID-19 during the workday must immediately wear a mask (regardless of the COVID-19 Community Level of the county in which they work), notify their supervisor,



promptly leave the workplace and isolate consistent with CDC recommendations on [isolation](#) and workplace safety protocols.

Employees and onsite contractors who were in the USDA workplace within 3 days of either symptom onset or a positive COVID-19 test, **must** report it via this  [form](#).

#### **10. What should individuals do if they test positive for COVID-19?**

Employees and onsite contractors who were in the USDA workplace within 3 days of either symptom onset or a positive COVID-19 test, **must** report it via this  [form](#), which includes information for contact tracing. If an employee or onsite contractor is too sick to complete the form, the supervisor should work with them to gather the information. Employees should share the completed form with Pandemic Coordinators, or their designee. The Pandemic Coordinator or their designee is responsible for coordinating cleaning and the notification of close contacts, as needed.

Any individual (employee or contractor) with probable or confirmed COVID-19, regardless of their vaccination status, should isolate at home for 5 days, consistent with CDC [recommendations](#) on [isolation](#) and monitor their symptoms. This includes people who have a [positive viral test](#) for COVID-19, regardless of whether or not they have symptoms, and people with symptoms of COVID-19, including people who are awaiting test results or have not been tested. People with [symptoms](#) should isolate even if they do not know if they have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19.

Individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 and never developed symptoms can end isolation after 5 full days after their positive COVID-19 test, assuming compliance with any agency testing requirements. Such an individual should continue to wear a mask around others for an additional 5 days after the end of their 5-day isolation period. If they develop symptoms at any point, they should start a 5-day isolation period over, with day 0 being their first day of symptoms.

Individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 and had [symptoms](#) can end their isolation after 5 full days from the onset of symptoms if they are fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication, their other symptoms have improved, and they have met any agency testing requirements. Note that loss of taste and smell may persist for weeks or months after recovery and need not delay the end of isolation. Those individuals who end their isolation after 5 full days should continue to wear a mask around others for an additional 5 days.

#### **11. What should individuals do if they were exposed to someone who tested positive for COVID-19?**

Personnel who have had a close contact (defined as being within 6 feet of someone who has [probable](#) or confirmed COVID-19 for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period) should follow CDC and local, state and Tribal guidance for quarantine. If an asymptomatic individual comes into close contact with someone with COVID-19, they do not need to quarantine if they are [up to date with COVID-19 vaccines](#), including recommended [booster shots](#) and [additional primary shots](#) for some immunocompromised



people, or if they had confirmed COVID-19 within the last 90 days (they tested positive using a [viral test](#)).

If an individual has (a) received a booster dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, or (b) completed the primary series of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine within the last 6 months, or (c) completed the primary series of the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccine within the last 2 months, the individual should wear a mask around others for 10 days after exposure to someone who tested positive for COVID-19, and, if possible, test for COVID-19 on the 5<sup>th</sup> day after exposure.

If an individual (a) is not vaccinated, or (b) has completed the primary series of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine over 6 months ago and is not boosted, or (c) has completed the primary series of the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccine over 2 months ago and is not boosted, the individual should stay home for 5 days after exposure to someone who tested positive for COVID-19 and continue to wear a mask around others for 5 additional days. The individual should test on the 5th day after exposure, if possible. If the individual cannot quarantine, the individual must wear a mask for 10 days.

Any individual, regardless of vaccination status, who is experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 should be tested and stay home.

**12. What type of leave is available for an employee who is required to isolate or quarantine and is unable to telework?**

If an employee is required to quarantine after official travel or a close contact while on duty and is unable to telework, the employee should receive weather and safety leave while the employee is quarantined.

However, if an employee has probable or confirmed COVID-19 and cannot telework, the employee should isolate. In such situations, the employee may request sick leave, accrued annual leave, or other forms of earned paid time off (e.g., compensatory time off or credit hours) or unpaid leave, as appropriate. Although weather and safety leave would generally be unavailable, to mitigate close contacts in the workplace, agencies may on a limited basis offer up to 3 days of administrative leave to employees who have COVID-19 symptoms and are isolating while actively seeking to be tested.

**13. Are health services available at USDA?**

**Yes.** For employees located in the National Capital Regional, there is a Health Unit in the South Building (Room 1411, first floor, wing 4). The Health Unit provides basic primary care services including COVID-19 testing, COVID-19 vaccines, COVID-19 boosters, and flu shots. Appointments are needed for shots and employees should call (202) 720-9522.

**14. Does the review process for the 50 in-person limit apply to all events, meetings, and conferences?**

**No.** The review process for events/meetings/conferences with more than 50 people in-person (from USDA or elsewhere) only applies to agency hosted events in counties where the COVID-19 Community Level is HIGH. It does not apply to third party hosted



events/meetings/conferences or to agency hosted events where the COVID-19 Community Level is LOW OR MEDIUM.

**15. Who approves an agency hosting an in-person event/meeting/conference with more than 50 attendees?**

When approval is required, the Mission Area or Agency Head approves in-person events/meetings/conferences with more than 50 attendees in consultation with USDA's Senior COVID-19 Advisors. For purposes of this request for approval, Mission Area/Agency Head does not refer to the Secretary. Requests can be submitted to [sradvisorcovid@usda.gov](mailto:sradvisorcovid@usda.gov).

**16. Must USDA ask attendees about their vaccination status?**

**In counties where the COVID-19 Community Level is MEDIUM or HIGH**, in person attendees at any meeting, conferences, and events hosted by USDA, regardless of size, must provide proof that they are fully vaccinated. In requesting this information, USDA 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 within the previous 3 days.

In counties where the **COVID-19 Community Level is HIGH**, all in-person attendees must wear a mask in public indoor settings regardless of vaccination status.

**Administrative Leave for Vaccines**

**17. Can an employee receive administrative leave for the time it takes to receive the vaccine?**

**Yes.** In most circumstances, the agency authorizes employees to take up to four hours of administrative leave to travel to the vaccination site, complete any vaccination dose, and return to work. Additional time may be granted for extenuating circumstances such as the distance to the vaccination site. Employees may only receive administrative leave during their normal work hours and may not receive administrative leave or overtime work for time spent getting a vaccine outside their tour of duty.

On January 21, 2022, in the judicial action of *Feds for Medical Freedom, et al. v. Biden, et al.*, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas issued an Order temporarily enjoining the implementation and enforcement of Executive Order 14043, which required COVID-19 vaccination for federal employees. While the preliminary injunction is in place, time spent obtaining a COVID-19 vaccination is not considered official duty time because the vaccination is not a requirement of employment.





**18. Can employees receive paid time off to address any side effects?**

**Yes.** Supervisors are authorized to grant leave-eligible employees up to 2 workdays of administrative leave if an employee has an adverse reaction to a COVID-19 vaccination (including primary series doses, authorized boosters, and authorized additional doses) that prevents the employee from working. If more than 2 workdays are needed to recover, the employee may request other paid or non-paid leave (e.g., sick leave, annual leave, leave without pay (LWOP), etc.). Employees may submit corrected timesheets charging administrative leave for adverse reactions retroactively to March 11, 2021.

Employees should communicate with their supervisor and HR organization to correct timesheets in accordance with the guidance and answer any specific questions they might have.

**19. What happens if an employee has an adverse reaction to the COVID-19 vaccine?**

Employees who experience an adverse reaction to the required COVID-19 vaccination on or after the date of the Executive Order (September 9, 2021) may be afforded coverage under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA) for any adverse reactions to the vaccine itself, and for any injuries sustained while obtaining the vaccination.

**20. Can an employee receive retroactive administrative leave for taking a family member to receive a vaccine?**

**Yes.** Employees may receive administrative leave of up to four hours per dose to take family members to a COVID-19 vaccination. This applies from July 29, 2021, and forward. For this purpose, a "family member" is an individual who meets the definition of that term in OPM's leave regulations (see 5 CFR 630.201).

**21. Can I receive administrative leave to receive my COVID-19 booster shot?**

**Yes.** Supervisors may grant leave-eligible employees up to 4 hours of administrative leave to their employees who choose to receive a COVID-19 booster shot. Administrative leave of up to two days is authorized if any employee has an adverse reaction to a COVID-19 booster dose (i.e., no more than 2 workdays for reactions associated with a single dose). If an employee needs to spend less time getting the booster shot, only the needed amount of administrative leave should be granted. Additional time may be granted for extenuating circumstances such as the distance to the vaccination site. Employees may only receive administrative leave during their normal work hours and may not receive administrative leave or overtime work for time spent getting a booster shot outside their tour of duty.

**Vaccination Requirement for USDA Employees**

*Please refer to the Safer Federal Workforce Taskforce for [additional FAQs](#) on this topic. Please note that, consistent with the January 21, 2022, preliminary nationwide injunction, USDA will take no action to implement or enforce the COVID-19 vaccination requirement pursuant to E.O. 14043. Therefore, all enforcement actions are currently paused at this time, including any reply periods contained in an employee's Notice of Proposed Suspension and any decision on an*



*employee's Proposed Suspension, so long as the nationwide preliminary injunction is in place. At this time, enforcement actions associated with the COVID-19 vaccination requirement pursuant to E.O. 14043 that were already effectuated prior to the nationwide injunction remain in place. For example, the Agency will not repeal, rescind, or revoke letters of education and counseling, cautions, or proposals of suspensions. Unvaccinated employees are required to comply with all other COVID-19 safety protocols for unvaccinated employees consistent with the [USDA COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan](#).*

## **22. Are Federal Employees required to be vaccinated?**

On January 21, 2022, in the judicial action of *Feds for Medical Freedom, et al. v. Biden, et al.*, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas issued an Order temporarily enjoining the implementation and enforcement of Executive Order 14043, which required COVID-19 vaccination for federal employees. The Department of Justice ("DOJ") appealed the preliminary injunction to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, but the preliminary injunction remains in place at this time. While the preliminary injunction remains in place, USDA will take no action to implement or enforce the COVID-19 vaccination requirement. USDA continues to encourage everyone to get a COVID-19 vaccination and booster shot if they have not already to protect themselves, their children and loved ones.

## **23. When is a Federal Employee considered fully vaccinated?**

Employees will be considered fully vaccinated 2 weeks after they have received the requisite number of doses of COVID-19 vaccine approved or authorized for emergency use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration or that have been listed for emergency use by the World Health Organization. For vaccines that require 2 doses, an employee is fully vaccinated 2 weeks after the employee has received the second dose. For a single dose vaccine (i.e., Johnson and Johnson (J&J)/Janssen), an employee is fully vaccinated 2 weeks after receiving a single dose.

## **24. Are boosters required for Federal Employees?**

Boosters are NOT currently required by vaccine requirement for Federal employees. However, USDA is asking employees to voluntarily update their information in the Proof of Vaccination Survey because the Proof of Vaccination Survey is the official repository of vaccine status information and safety protocols are different depending on whether an employee is up to date with COVID-19 vaccines, including recommended booster shots. Employees who do not submit proof of the recommended booster in the Proof of Vaccination Survey will not be considered up to date with COVID-19 vaccines.

Asymptomatic individuals who have come into close contact with someone with COVID-19 do not need to quarantine if they have submitted proof that they are up to date with COVID-19 vaccines, including recommended booster shots, or they had confirmed COVID-19 within the last 90 days. Such individuals only need to take precautions for 10 days by wearing a well-fitting mask when around others, avoiding being unmasked around others, avoiding people who are immunocompromised or at high risk for severe disease, and avoiding high-risk settings.





In contrast, employees who have not submitted proof that they are up to date with COVID-19 vaccines, including recommended booster shots, must quarantine for at least 5 full days after their last close contact with someone who has COVID-19.

**25. What happens to any enforcement action(s) related to the COVID-19 vaccination mandate pursuant to E.O. 14043 during the preliminary injunction?**

USDA is following the guidance in the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force [FAQs](#), including regarding enforcement. Of note, **USDA has temporarily suspended all disciplinary actions related to enforcement of the COVID-19 vaccination requirement pursuant to E.O. 14043.** Agencies will inform all employees who are subject to proposed or active disciplinary action related to the vaccine mandate that disciplinary action is being paused so long as the nationwide preliminary injunction is in place. Unvaccinated employees are required to comply with all other COVID-19 safety protocols for unvaccinated employees consistent with the [USDA COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan](#).

**Proof of Vaccination and Booster Shots for USDA Employees and Privacy Act Information**

*Please refer to the Safer Federal Workforce Taskforce for [additional FAQs](#) on this topic.*

**26. How does a USDA employee submit proof of vaccination or booster shot?**

Vaccinated employees may voluntarily submit proof of vaccination or booster shot by clicking [here](#). Employees should contact their supervisor with questions about submitting proof of vaccination.

**27. What must employees submit to prove their vaccination status?**

All vaccinated employees, even if they have previously attested to their vaccination status, are encouraged to provide proof of vaccination and booster shot. Proof of vaccination means a copy of the record of immunization from a health care provider or pharmacy, a copy of the COVID-19 Vaccination Record Card, a copy of medical records documenting the vaccination, a copy of immunization records from a public health or state immunization information system, or a copy of any other official documentation or verification containing required data points. The document submitted must identify the type of vaccine administered, date(s) of administration, and the name of the health care professional(s) or clinic site(s) administering the vaccine(s). Employees must certify under penalty of perjury that the documentation they are submitting is true and correct.

Employees may provide a digital copy including, for example, a digital photograph, scanned image, or PDF of such a record that clearly and legibly displays the information outlined above.

**28. Can an employee provide a recent antibody test to prove vaccination status?**

**No.** A recent antibody test cannot be used to prove vaccination status.



**29. Should an employee who is teleworking full-time or is a remote employee submit proof of vaccination or booster shot?**

**Yes.** All employees, regardless of their duty station or telework status, are encouraged to voluntarily submit proof of vaccination and booster shot.

**30. What if an employee or supervisor is having technical difficulties in submitting proof of vaccination or booster shot through the online system?**

Please first check [this](#) website with FAQs related to the proof of vaccination survey. If you are still having trouble, please contact OCIO at [OCIO.Survey@usda.gov](mailto:OCIO.Survey@usda.gov).

**31. What should managers do to ensure employees are compliant with workplace safety protocols?**

Managers received further information in the Return to the Physical Workplace Supervisor Desk Guide on their role in ensuring employees are compliant with workplace safety protocols. Managers do not have access to employee's proof of vaccination documents.

**32. Who will have access to an employee's vaccine information?**

All vaccination information is maintained in accordance with all applicable laws, including the Privacy Act. SharePoint is being used among other USDA Microsoft 365 Power Platform tools to collect and process the data. Only persons with a "need to know" will have access to an employee's vaccine documentation. For now, persons with a "need to know" includes USDA employees who have been hand selected by their Mission Area or Staff Office to participate in the effort to check proof of vaccination.

**33. How long will employee vaccine information be stored?**

The Employee Medical File System Records (EMF) is maintained for the period of the employee's service in the agency and is then transferred to the National Personnel Records Center for storage, or as appropriate, to the next employing Federal agency. Other medical records are either retained at the agency for various lengths of time in accordance with the National Archives and Records Administration's records schedules or destroyed (by shredding, burning, or securely erasing electronic data from storage media) when they have served their purpose or when the employee leaves the agency.

**34. Is my information stored in accordance with the Privacy Act?**

**Yes.** The collection and use of this information are subject to the OPM/GOVT-10 Employee Medical File (EMF) system of records notice (SORN) and OPM regulations (5 C.F.R. part 293, subpart E). Under those rules, USDA has written instructions for its EMF system with appropriate safeguards.

**35. Does HIPAA apply to USDA?**

**No.** The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) does not apply to an employee's vaccination status because USDA is not a covered entity under the statute.



HIPAA's Privacy Rule limits the uses and disclosures of individuals' personal health information. HIPAA's Privacy Rule standards address the use and disclosure of individuals' health information (known as "protected health information") by entities subject to the Privacy Rule. These individuals and organizations are called "covered entities." See 45 C.F.R. §§ 160.103. The Federal government, as an employer, is not a HIPAA-covered entity. Therefore, HIPAA does not apply to questions involving Federal employees' vaccination status.

**36. What if an employee does not have access to the USDA proof of vaccination survey?**

If an employee does not have access to the proof of vaccination survey, the employee should follow the procedures specified by their Agency's human resources contact to provide the proof of vaccination to the Agency in an alternative confidential protocol specified by that agency in accordance with the Privacy Act.

**37. Should a manager keep an employee's proof of vaccination documentation?**

**No.** In the event an employee provides a manager with their proof of vaccination documentation, the manager should direct the employee to complete the proof of vaccination survey and return the documentation to the employee. In the event an employee does not have access to the proof of vaccination survey.

**38. We have new employees onboarding. How should they provide their proof of vaccination if they do not have USDA credentials yet?**

The new hire should be encouraged to voluntarily send their proof of vaccination form to Human Resources. If the supervisor receives the proof of vaccination form, they should send it back to the new hire for the new hire to send it to the Agency's HR contact to process as required by that Agency's protocol.

**39. Is USDA collecting information about which employees have received a COVID-19 vaccine booster shot?**

Yes. USDA is asking employees to voluntarily update their information in the Proof of Vaccination Survey to indicate if they have received a booster. Although employees are not required to do so, employees are encouraged to voluntarily provide this information. If an employee has had close contact with someone with COVID-19, safety protocols are different depending on whether the employee has provided proof through the Proof of Vaccination Survey that they are up to date with COVID-19 vaccines, including recommended booster shots.

**40. What do I do if I feel I am being harassed or discriminated against because of my vaccination status or my decision to voluntarily wear a mask when mask wearing is not required?**

USDA considers allegations of harassment to be very serious. Employees who witness or experience harassment in the workplace should immediately report it to their manager, supervisor, any management official in their office or agency, or their Civil Rights Office before the harassment becomes severe or pervasive. Individuals who believe they have



been subjected to or witnessed harassment in the workplace are encouraged to inform the alleged harasser directly that the conduct is unwelcome and must stop. Employees should also report harassment to management at an early stage to prevent its escalation. Reports of harassment need not be in writing or conform to any format. Allegations of both EEO and non-EEO harassment will be addressed by a management inquiry.

Contact your respective departmental or agency Civil Rights Office or Employee Relations Office representative for further details on how to file a complaint or grievance. Individuals who believe they have been subjected to EEO-based harassment, including sexual harassment, discrimination, or retaliation, may also file an EEO complaint by contacting their Mission Area, Agency, or Staff Office EEO Counselor within 45 calendar days of the alleged incident. Failure to do so may result in dismissal of the EEO complaint for untimeliness. The expiration of the 45 calendar-day period does not preclude the individual from reporting the incident to a management official for a management inquiry.

### **Employee or Applicant Requests for Accommodations with Respect to Workforce Safety Protocols (e.g., masking, physical distancing, screening testing) for Medical or Religious Reasons**

*Please refer to the Safer Federal Workforce Taskforce for [additional FAQs](#) on this topic.*

#### **41. What happens to any medical or religious requests for an exception to the COVID-19 vaccination mandate pursuant to E.O. 14043 during the preliminary injunction?**

USDA is following the guidance in the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force FAQs, including on accommodations. **USDA is pausing all adjudications of employees' medical or religious accommodation requests related to the vaccine mandate. Unvaccinated employees do not need an exception to the vaccine mandate so long as the nationwide preliminary injunction is in place.**

Unvaccinated employees are required to comply with all other COVID-19 safety protocols for unvaccinated employees consistent with the [USDA COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan](#).

#### **42. How should I submit a request for an accommodation with respect to a workplace safety protocol for a medical or religious reason?**

Employees should submit a request for a medical accommodation to their Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator. [Here](#) is a link to the Reasonable Accommodation Coordinators.

Employees should submit their request for a religious accommodation to their Religious Accommodation Coordinator. [Here](#) is a link to the Religious Accommodation Coordinators, which includes a religious accommodation request form. Requests must be in writing but there is no requirement to use a particular format.



**43. How should the Agency process workplace safety protocol related accommodation requests for those receiving job offer letters?**

For new hires, the Agencies should process reasonable or religious accommodation requests through their Agencies normal point of contact for those types of requests. Usually that will be a reasonable accommodation coordinator for the medical accommodation requests and a point of contact in Human resources for the religious accommodation requests. However, their hiring should not be delayed if they request an accommodation. The request will be processed with other requests pending with the Agency.

**44. When should I submit a request for an accommodation with respect to a workplace safety protocol?**

Employees should immediately request an accommodation with respect to a workplace safety protocol due to a medical condition or a sincerely held religious belief, practice or observance through their [Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator](#) or [Religious Accommodation Coordinator](#). Employees who have requested an accommodation must indicate this on the [proof of vaccination survey](#).

**45. What recourse does an employee have if the employee's workplace safety protocol related request for an accommodation is denied?**

If an employee's reasonable accommodation request is denied, the employee may request reconsideration pursuant to DR 4300-008 and/or may file an EEO complaint. Bargaining unit employees may file a grievance to the extent permitted under the negotiated grievance procedures contained within a current collective bargaining agreement, or file an EEO complaint, but not both.

**46. What medical conditions does the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) consider a reason not to receive the COVID-19 vaccines?**

The CDC considers a history of the following medical conditions to be reasons not to receive the COVID-19 vaccines:

- a. Severe allergic reaction (e.g., anaphylaxis) after a previous dose or to a component of the COVID-19 vaccine; and
- b. Immediate allergic reaction of any severity to a previous dose or known (diagnosed) allergy to a component of the COVID-19 vaccine.

If an individual is allergic to a component of one or more COVID-19 vaccines, that individual may not be allergic to components in all COVID-19 vaccines.

**47. Are there circumstances that the CDC recommends delaying vaccination for COVID-19?**

**Yes.** In a limited circumstance for specific medical conditions, the CDC recommends delaying vaccination for COVID-19. These circumstances are identified at [Vaccinations | Safer Federal Workforce. Employees may also consult with their medical provider.](#) During



the period in which vaccination is delayed, an employee must follow applicable masking, physical distancing, and testing protocols for not fully vaccinated individuals, as well as applicable travel guidance. There may be circumstances in which an agency determines that the nature of an employee's job responsibilities requires heightened safety protocols during the intervening time.

**48. If an employee is not fully vaccinated what protocols should that individual follow?**

Employees who are not fully vaccinated must follow applicable masking, physical distancing, and testing protocols as well as applicable travel guidance.

**49. Is vaccination for COVID-19 recommended for people who are pregnant, trying to get pregnant or might become pregnant in the future?**

**Yes.** The CDC recommends COVID-19 vaccination for [people who are pregnant, breastfeeding, trying to become pregnant now, or trying to become pregnant in the future](#). The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine also [recommend](#) that all pregnant individuals be vaccinated against COVID-19.

**50. Should an employee who has had a prior COVID-19 infection be fully vaccinated?**

**Yes.** An employee who has had a prior COVID-19 infection should still receive their COVID-19 vaccine, subject to CDC guidance. The CDC recommends that vaccination of people with known current SARS- CoV-2 infection should be delayed until the person has recovered from the acute illness (if the person had symptoms) and has satisfied the [criteria](#) to discontinue isolation.

**51. Should an employee delay a COVID-19 vaccine because they have recently received another vaccine, such as the seasonal influenza vaccine?**

**No.** COVID-19 vaccines may be administered without regard to timing of other vaccines. This includes simultaneous administration of COVID-19 vaccine and other vaccines on the same day.

**52. Should an employee delay a second dose of a two-dose series mRNA vaccine series because of lack of availability of the second dose?**

Both Pfizer and Moderna are mRNA vaccines. In situations where the same mRNA vaccine product is temporarily unavailable, it is preferable to delay the second dose to receive the same product than to receive a mixed series using a different product. In exceptional situations in which the mRNA vaccine product given for the first dose cannot be determined or is no longer available, any available mRNA COVID-19 vaccine may be administered at a minimum interval of 28 days between doses to complete the mRNA COVID-19 vaccination series.





## **Vaccination Self-Certification and Safety Requirements for Federal Contractors**

*Please refer to the Safer Federal Workforce Taskforce for [additional FAQs](#) on this topic.*

### **53. Are contractors also subject to masking and physical distancing requirements?**

**Yes.** Contractors must ensure that their employees and visitors comply with CDC guidance for masking and physical distancing at a covered contractor's workplace.

### **54. Will USDA inquire regarding the vaccination status of onsite contractor employees?**

**Yes.** When required by the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force guidance, USDA will ask about the vaccination status of onsite contractor employees. Onsite contractor employees must attest to the truthfulness of the responses they provide. 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 test from no later than the previous 3 days prior to entry to a federal building or USDA worksite. If a contractor employee is regularly tested pursuant to an agency testing program, then they do not need to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test from no later than the previous 3 days prior to entry to a federal building unless required to by the agency testing program.

### **55. Who is considered "on-site" for purposes of complying with this guidance?**

"On-site" means contractor personnel, cooperators, volunteers, visiting guests of USDA employees, USDA remote employees, visiting employees of other non-USDA Federal agencies, and elected USDA county committee members who share USDA facilities (which includes vehicles and aircraft) or work at an outdoor site together with Federal employees on a regular basis on activities that make social distancing impractical or is contraindicated by operational needs to complete work to be performed (e.g., FS firefighting crews; county committee meetings and executive sessions). All on-site personnel should complete the non-employee contractor/visitor vaccine certification form.

For delivery services where a delivery driver may spend more than 30 minutes delivering packages to various offices, the non-employee contractor/visitor vaccine certification form should be completed. For short drop-offs, the vaccine certification form is not required but these individuals do need to follow the masking requirements.

### **56. Which form should an "on-site contractor" use? Does USDA need to collect and keep a copy of the form?**

When required by the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force guidance, all on-site contractors need to complete [this](#) form. After the on-site contractor shows USDA staff the completed form, the on-site contractor should retain it on their person while on Federal premises. On-site contractor can use a previously used form if there is no change in vaccination status. If on-site contractor is not fully vaccinated, they will have to provide new documentation of a negative COVID-19 test in the past 3 days when working in a USDA facility or worksite.



**57. Do the workplace safety protocols apply only at a Federal workplace?**

**No.** The Guidance applies to all covered contractor employees and to all contractor or subcontractor workplace locations. While at a Federal workplace, covered contractor employees must also comply with any additional agency workplace safety requirements for that workplace.

**58. What does Executive Order (EO) 14042 require, and what is the impact of federal court order enjoining the vaccine mandate in EO 14042?**

EO 14042 requires federal agencies to include a clause in certain types of contracts and contract-like instruments, and extensions of or exercise of an option on certain types of existing contracts and contract-like instruments, executed on or after October 15, 2021, that requires compliance with guidance issued on September 24, 2021, by the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force (Task Force) at <https://www.saferfederalworkforce.gov/faq/contractors/> regarding COVID-19 safety protocols, including COVID-19 vaccination requirements. The clause also must be included in any subcontracts that are subject to the EO. Appendices A through C contain approved clauses for implementing the EO.

On December 1, 2021, OMB issued initial guidance on implementing requirements of Executive Order 14042 while ensuring compliance with a court order covering the States of Kentucky, Ohio, and Tennessee. Since the issuance of that initial guidance, on December 7 another court issued a nationwide injunction—an order that bars enforcement of the Executive Order in any state or outlying area of the United States. Both court orders are preliminary and may be supplemented, modified, or vacated, depending on the course of ongoing litigation. As a result, the December 1, 2021, OMB guidance has been rescinded. Given the uncertainty surrounding the court orders, OMB issued updated guidance that will apply covered contracts and contract-like instruments.

Accordingly, USDA will take no action to enforce the clause implementing the requirements of Executive Order 14042, absent further written notice, where the place of performance identified in the contract is in a U.S. state or outlying area subject to a court order prohibiting the application of vaccine mandate requirements pursuant to the Executive Order (hereinafter, “Excluded State or Outlying Area”). In all other circumstances, the Government will enforce the clause, except for contractor employees who perform substantial work on or in connection with a covered contract in an Excluded State or Outlying Area, or in a covered contractor workplace located in an Excluded State or Outlying Area. A current list of such Excluded States and Outlying Areas is maintained at <https://www.saferfederalworkforce.gov/contractors/>.

**59. What does this mean for existing contracts or contract-like instruments for work performed in an Excluded State or Outlying Area that contain the clause either at award or to which a contractor is agreed by modification?**

If the work under such a contract is performed entirely in an Excluded State or Outlying Area, the USDA will not enforce the clause implementing vaccine requirements of the Executive Order into the contract.



**60. For existing contracts that do not include a clause implementing vaccine requirements of Executive Order 14042, will USDA seek to amend to include that clause?**

Whether USDA will seek to add the clause to a contract implementing the vaccine requirements of the Executive Order will depend on whether a State or outlying area continues to be an Excluded State or Outlying Area as litigation moves forward:

- A. If the work under such a contract or contract-like instrument is performed entirely in an Excluded State or Outlying Area, USDA will not attempt to add a clause implementing requirements of the Executive Order into the contract or contract-like instrument.
- B. If work performance under the contract to which the Executive Order applies is not in an Excluded State or Outlying Area, then when exercising an option, issuing a new order under the contract, or extending the term of the contract, USDA will pursue bilateral modification of the contract to include the clause. If USDA is not exercising an option, issuing a new order, or extending the contract's term, the agency *may* pursue bilateral modification to include the clause.

**In either case**, when requesting that a contractor agree to the addition of the clause, USDA will inform the contractor of the following:

- USDA will take no action to enforce the clause implementing requirements of Executive Order 14042, absent further written notice from the agency, where the place of performance identified in the contract is in a U.S. state or outlying area subject to a court order prohibiting the application of requirements pursuant to the Executive Order (hereinafter, "Excluded State or Outlying Area"). In all other circumstances, USDA will enforce the clause, except for contractor employees who perform substantial work on or in connection with a covered contract in an Excluded State or Outlying Area, or in a covered contractor workplace located in an Excluded State or Outlying Area. A current list of such Excluded States and Outlying Areas is maintained at <https://www.saferfederalworkforce.gov/contractors/>.

**61. What will USDA do with solicitations (existing or future), including solicitations for new orders to be issued under existing indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity contracts not containing a clause that implements requirements of Executive Order 14042?**

The answer depends on whether a State or outlying area continues to be an Excluded State or Outlying Area as litigation moves forward. For now, given the nationwide injunction, only the following applies: If the solicitation indicates that work under the contract to be awarded will be performed entirely in an Excluded State or Outlying Area, the solicitation should not include a clause implementing the vaccine requirements of Executive Order 14042. If the solicitation does include such a clause, USDA will remove it through an amendment to the solicitation.



**62. Must contractors continue to comply with masking, social distancing, and COVID-19 testing requirements when working in Federal facilities or lands?**

**Yes.** The court orders only apply to the application of vaccine requirements mandated pursuant to Executive Order 14042. There is no change to the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force’s guidance for COVID-19 workplace safety protocols for Federal agencies. Federal agency workplace safety protocols for Federal buildings and Federally controlled facilities still apply in all locations. Contractor employees working onsite in those facilities must still follow those Federal agency workplace safety protocols. For USDA, contractor employees must follow the same protocols and attestation requirements applicable to visitors.

**63. Does this guidance apply to sales of surplus real and personal property?**

**No,** this Guidance does not apply to sales of surplus real and personal property.

**64. Does this Guidance apply to contracts that are solely for products?**

**No,** this Guidance does not apply to contracts that are solely for products.

**Vaccination Self-Certification and Safety Requirements for On-Site Visitors (including Contractors Volunteers, Cooperators, Delivery Persons, and Other On-Site Federal and Non-Federal Personnel)**

**65. How will USDA inquire regarding the vaccination status of visitors to federal buildings?**

Visitors to federal buildings in counties with a MEDIUM or HIGH COVID-19 Community Level should be asked to provide information about vaccination status. Visitors who are not fully vaccinated or who decline to provide information about their vaccination status must provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test from no later than the previous 3 days prior to entry to a federal building in counties with a MEDIUM or HIGH COVID-19 Community Level.

**Individuals entering a federal building, federally controlled indoor worksite, or federal land to obtain a public service or benefit do not need to complete the form or show documentation of a negative COVID-19 test result.** However, they must comply with all relevant CDC guidance and safety protocols, including mask-wearing and physical distancing requirements.

**66. How will USDA ask visitors about their vaccination status?**

The Certification of Vaccination [form](#) may be emailed to visitors in advance of arrival or it should be provided when they enter a federal building or federally controlled indoor worksite in a county with a MEDIUM or HIGH COVID-19 Community Level. Visitors may email their vaccine self-certification form to their USDA point of contact in advance of their visit. For those visitors that do not email the information to their point of contact ahead of time, visitors should be directed to complete the Certification of Vaccination form and submit it to their USDA point



of contact.

Upon arrival, visitors who are not fully vaccinated or decline to answer are required to show to their USDA point of contact a negative COVID-19 test result from within the previous three days.

USDA will collect and maintain only the Certification of Vaccination forms.

**67. How will USDA confirm that all visitors are complying with certification requirements?**

It is the responsibility of the host agency (including in multi-tenant buildings) to ensure that a visitor in a county with a MEDIUM or HIGH COVID-19 Community Level has completed the vaccine certification form and is following the appropriate COVID-19 safety protocols, including asking visitors who are not vaccinated to show a negative COVID-19 test result from within the previous three days. Agencies should do this in a way that makes most sense for them, including providing guidance for staff. Host agency personnel may keep a list of regular onsite visitors who have certified they are fully vaccinated. In co-located facilities, agencies are required to harmonize on how they are checking the information and ensuring compliance with the appropriate COVID-19 safety protocols. In the NCR, when the COVID-19 Community Level MEDIUM or HIGH, security officers will verbally ask screening questions to visitors and contractors without PIV cards or Site Badges at visitor entrances, but agencies maintain the responsibility for collecting all verification of vaccination forms and visually confirming test results (if applicable). Implementation guidance has been circulated to the Pandemic Coordinators.

**68. Is there standard text to share with visitors in advance to describe workplace safety policies?**

The following text may be shared with visitors in advance of their visit:

We look forward to your visit to USDA. Based on guidance from the White House, visitors to our buildings who are not seeking a public benefit need to complete the Certification of Vaccination [form](#) and email it in advance to their USDA point of contact or be prepared to show it upon entry if the COVID-19 Community Level is MEDIUM or HIGH. If you are unable to complete the form in advance, a copy will be available at the building entrances and must be completed and submitted to your USDA point of contact upon entry. Visitors who are not fully vaccinated will also be required to show a negative COVID-19 test result from within the previous three days, which must be presented upon arrival to your host and/or the security officer and not emailed in advance, if the COVID-19 Community Level is MEDIUM or HIGH. Please be aware that current USDA policy is that all employees, contractors, and visitors must wear masks in all USDA buildings and government owned or leased vehicles, regardless of vaccination status, if the COVID-19 Community Level is HIGH. Mask wearing is voluntary if the COVID-19 Community Level is LOW or MEDIUM.

**69. Do USDA employees who visit a non-USDA Federal facility for meetings, interviews, or training need to fill out any forms?**

If the COVID-19 Community Level is MEDIUM or HIGH, employees visiting a non-USDA Federal facility for meetings, interviews, or training are to fill out the Visitor Certification of



Vaccination when they enter the Federal facility and keep the form on their person.

**70. Does this requirement apply to other federal personnel (e.g., Department of the Interior, Department of Justice, Department of Homeland Security officials) who visit our offices or other facilities?**

If the COVID-19 Community Level is MEDIUM or HIGH, other Federal personnel should fill out the visitor certification [form](#) and maintain it on their person while in or on USDA Federal buildings or lands.

**71. Does this form need to be filled out by all cleaning personnel, custodians, landlords, and maintenance staff at all Federal facilities?**

If the COVID-19 Community Level is MEDIUM or HIGH, building staff should fill out the non-employee contractor [form](#) and maintain it on their person while in or on Federal buildings or lands. Additional guidance about this implementation has been shared with the Pandemic Coordinators.

**72. What if a visitor declines to follow USDA's safety protocols for entry?**

Visitors who decline to submit a certification of vaccination form in counties where the COVID-19 Community Level is MEDIUM or HIGH, or otherwise fail to follow established safety protocols for entry are not permitted entry.

**73. What is the difference between USDA employees, on-site contractors, visitors, and customers? How can I tell?**

You should first determine whether an individual is performing work on-site or is merely a customer entering a Federal building or Federal land to obtain a public service or benefit. You may also check if the individual has a USDA employee PIV badge. Contractors and visitors (to the extent issued) should have different looking badges or stickers that they must wear indicating that they are non-Federal employees in a Federal facility. USDA county office employees should be considered employees for this purpose and are likewise encouraged to submit proof of vaccination through the online USDA system.

**Vaccination Self-Certification and Safety Requirements for Customers**

*Please refer to the Safer Federal Workforce Taskforce for [additional FAQs](#) on this topic.*

**74. Does the vaccination self-certification guidance apply to members of the public seeking a public benefit or service?**

**No.** The requirements related to asking visitors about their vaccination status and providing proof of a recent negative COVID-19 test **does not apply** to members of the public entering a Federal building or Federal land to obtain a public service or benefit. If customers are not fully vaccinated, these visitors must comply with all relevant CDC guidance, including wearing a mask and physically distancing from other people. USDA defines a public benefit or service as applying to all customers at service centers or field offices, recreation areas, food and nutrition direct service centers, and grain offices.





**75. What should a USDA employee do if a member of the public seeking a public benefit or service refuses to wear a mask and maintain physical distancing?**

If a customer refuses to comply with USDA's safety protocols, USDA employees can considerately make customers aware of the masking requirement in counties where the COVID-19 Community Level is HIGH. Customers who will not honor USDA's requirement should be asked, politely, to do so. If the customer refuses, that is the individual's right, but they must be directed to conduct business off-site (over the phone or online) and to please depart the premises. USDA employees should remain respectful yet safe and call for assistance from local authorities if the situation cannot be resolved.

**Telework and remote work**

**76. Are all positions now eligible to telework?**

**No.** Not all positions are eligible for telework due to the pandemic because the duties of some positions may require employees to be in a Federal facility, in the field, or other office location. The Department is committed to providing a better work experience for all employees.

**77. What if our agency collective bargaining agreement does not allow 4 days a week of telework, can an employee still telework up to 4 days under the Telework and Remote Work Directive?**

**No.** Agencies are obligated to notify their unions and engage in bargaining as appropriate. It is recommended agencies consult with their Office of Human Resources and Labor Relations staff to determine appropriate labor relations obligations and compliance with collective bargaining agreements.

**78. How are current Reasonable Accommodation agreements for full-time telework impacted by the Telework and Remote Work Directive?**

The Telework and Remote Work Directive does not impact current reasonable accommodation agreements. While telework can be a form of reasonable accommodation under appropriate circumstances, reasonable accommodation, and personal assistance service (PAS) are governed by a different USDA policy, Departmental Regulation 4300-008, not the USDA telework policy. Information on USDA's Reasonable Accommodation and Personal Assistance Services, contacts for requesting an accommodation or personal assistance services, training and FAQ's can be found at: <https://www.usda.gov/ra>.

**79. Will USDA have positions that can be performed remotely?**

**Yes.** The [Secretary's memo](#) directed Mission Areas and Staff Offices to perform a review of duty stations of positions to identify positions that can be effectively performed remotely. The results of the review will be communicated to each employee as part of an Agency's Return to the Physical Workplace plan. USDA's long-term policy on remote work is included in the Telework and Remote Work Directive that was finalized in November. To the extent



these matters are not covered by a collective bargaining agreement, agencies and staff offices will be obligated to fulfill any appropriate bargaining requested by their respective union.

**80. Can new positions be advertised as Telework-Eligible or Location Negotiable after Selection?**

**Yes.** Mission Areas have been instructed to list any new applicable positions as telework-eligible or location negotiable after selection if the position is deemed eligible.

**81. Will I still be eligible to receive awards if I work remotely?**

Eligibility for awards is not impacted by your duty station as long as your performance is acceptable. However, awards are given at the discretion of a supervisor.

**82. How are my state and local taxes affected by the new remote work changes?**

If an employee's residence or worksite changes to a different State or local jurisdiction (city/county), employees must complete new State and local tax withholding forms, as applicable.

Employee must review their pay stubs to ensure changes to tax status were processed correctly to avoid situations where repayment may need to occur due to error. If the employee identifies errors, they should report it to their respective HR Office.

**83. Who do I contact if I disagree with my initial notification of telework or remote work eligibility?**

Employees are encouraged to discuss concerns and/or seek clarification about the initial notification from their supervisor, should there be questions about their eligibility or potential changes to their eligibility that would fall within the purview of the Telework and Remote Work Programs DR 4080-811-002.

**84. Who do I contact if I have a complaint about my remote or telework assignment or feel my consideration was unequitable compared to a colleague?**

Non-bargaining unit employees may submit a grievance using the procedures in DR 4070-771-001, *Administrative Grievance System*, November 27, 2020, or file an EEO complaint, but not both. Likewise, a bargaining unit employee must follow the applicable negotiated grievance procedures or file an EEO complaint, but not both.

**Travel**

*Please refer to the Safer Federal Workforce Taskforce for [additional FAQs](#) on this topic.*

**85. Are there restrictions on official travel for fully vaccinated Federal employees?**

Travel restrictions have been lifted for domestic travel to counties within the United States and its territories with a LOW or MEDIUM COVID-19 Community Level. However, only mission



critical travel is permissible to counties with a HIGH COVID-19 Community Level to protect employee health and safety, with limited exceptions as determined by Agency and Staff Office Heads. International travel should also be avoided, if possible, unless it is mission critical (e.g., military deployments, COVID-19 response deployments/activities, diplomats traveling, high-level international negotiations that cannot occur remotely).

**86. What does mission critical mean for purposes of travel?**

Mission critical refers to activities necessary for the ongoing operation of the Department and its programs which cannot be performed remotely. Until further notice, employees should continue to limit official travel to mission critical activities, as determined by each Agency, and follow [CDC guidance](#), as appropriate. This decision to limit official travel to mission critical activities is made with the health and safety of our employees in mind. In limited circumstances where official travel is involved, Agencies may assign work based on an employee's vaccination status where the quarantine requirements for unvaccinated individuals in the destination locale would negatively impact the unvaccinated employee's ability to perform the assignment. Official travel can include distinct opportunities that uniquely advance USDA's diversity, equity, inclusion and workforce strategy and culture goals.

**87. While traveling, what health and safety guidelines must Federal employees who are fully vaccinated follow?**

**All travelers, including fully vaccinated Federal employees, should continue to take health and safety precautions.** CDC COVID-19 [prevention measures](#) continue to apply to all travelers, including those who are vaccinated. All travelers are required to [wear a mask](#) over nose and mouth on all planes, buses, trains, and other forms of public transportation traveling into, within, or out of the United States and in U.S. transportation hubs such as airports and other similar types of stations.

**88. What are the safety protocols for individuals who must travel for mission critical work and have recently come into close contact with someone with COVID-19?**

Official travel should not be approved for an individual who has come into close contact with someone with COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, for 10 days after the close contact. In rare circumstances where there is an urgent mission-critical need for the individual who had a close contact to undertake official travel during that time period, the individual must wear a well-fitting mask when around others for the duration of the 10 days.

If an employee who has contracted COVID-19 absolutely must undertake urgent mission-critical travel during days 6-10 after their first day of symptoms, or after the date of a positive test for an asymptomatic individual, the employee should be instructed to take other precautions for the entire duration of their travel, including wearing a [well-fitting mask](#) when around others and, to the extent possible, avoiding eating and drinking around others, avoiding environments such as dining facilities and gyms where they may be unmasked around others, avoiding people who are [immunocompromised or at high risk for severe disease](#), and avoiding nursing homes and other high-risk settings.



## **Employee wellbeing**

### **89. What programs and services are available to assist employees?**

The USDA Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available to all USDA employees. Through EAP, USDA employees and their family members, who reside in their households have access to licensed/certified counselors, licensed attorneys, and qualified financial consultants. EAP can assist you with emotional, family, marital, alcohol or drug use/abuse, relationship problems, and other issues related to employee's wellbeing. In addition EAP provides monthly live Webinars located on their website and on-demand access to [pre-recorded webinars](#) for staff on topics that range from parenting young children, understanding family dynamics, dealing with holiday stress, managing personal financing, and leadership strategies just to name a few. Some USDA offices have a Workplace Wellness Office which is available to assist employees. Employees can contact their agency representative or visit [USDA Employee Assistance Program](#) for more information on the program and all that it has to offer you.

## **Information technology**

### **90. Will I be notified when my new Linc Pass card is available?**

**Yes.** You will receive an email from HSPD12Admin@usaccess.gsa.gov that your LincPass is ready for pick up and Activation. Additional information about credentialing can be found [here](#).

### **91. I received an email that my Linc Pass card has been delivered to a location that is too far for me to drive. How do I go about getting the card sent to a closer Activation station?**

Please contact the USDA HSPD-12 helpdesk to assist with a card reroute. Additional information about credentialing can be found [here](#).

### **92. My current card has physically expired. Can I still go through the card renewal process to receive a new card?**

**No.** A renewal request cannot be created after card expiration (Requests must be made 1 day prior to expiration). The applicant will need to re-enroll.

NOTE: An expired badge cannot be used for enrollment, however if it is a reprint the expired badge will be turned in and a new one will be ordered by the sponsor. In the interim after verification of employee status, a site badge can be issued after the sponsor completes a AD1197 form. The site badge will be valid until the new badge arrives.

Please contact the USDA HSPD-12 Helpdesk for further instructions and guidance on the renewal process. Additional information about credentialing can be found [here](#). Facility Protection Division Helpdesk contact (202) 815-7474.



**93. Will I be supplied a printer and cell phone if I am approved for fulltime remote work? What about telework?**

USDA employees should expect support for any USDA-furnished device and service while working outside the office. [DR-3170-001](#), Section 5b allows for one machine and one phone per-person, and support services follow the remote-first Enterprise support practice.

Work with your supervisor to identify equipment needed to perform job duties. Cell phones are provided on a case-by-case basis and depends upon the needs of your office. Cell phones must be justified and approved by the immediate supervisor before distribution to any employee.

As printers are funded and procured by the agency, printers will require supervisors' approval. All printers must be procured thru OCIO approved vehicles. In addition, it is forbidden to use personal printers for government work.

As USDA takes steps to transition to an electronic and paperless environment, we strongly encourage agencies to take advantage of available technology such as electronic signatures and storing information electronically.

**94. Will employees teleworking to working remotely receive equipment for use at home and IT support?**

**Yes.** USDA employees should expect support for any USDA-furnished device and service while working outside the office. [DR-3170-001](#), Section 5b allows for one machine and one phone per-person, and support services follow the remote-first Enterprise support practice. Exceptions for special circumstances require approval and must use OCIO-approved devices. Reasonable Accommodation requests will continue to follow Departmental Regulation 4300-008. OCIO continues to review and improve services, practices, and policies related to remote work, and will update these FAQ accordingly.

**Human Resources**

**95. What happens to my health benefits if I voluntarily relocate to an area due to remote work approval, and that new area is not covered by my health benefits plan? (NEW)**

If employee voluntarily relocates to an area not covered by their health benefits plan, the employee may change enrollment. (See instructions on back of the [SF-2809](#))

**96. When can a new hire or transfer enter on duty (EOD)? (NEW)**

A final job offer letter with the EOD can only be set by the Human Resources office. Employee can report on the date identified on the Final Job Offer Letter.



**97. Where can I find the 2022 General Schedule (GS) locality pay tables? (NEW)**

GS locality pay tables, providing the 2022 annual pay increase by geographic location are posted on the [OPM website](#).

**98. What do I do if I am late to my tour of duty because of changes in transportation availability due to COVID-19?**

Communicate with your immediate supervisor for available options. This may include modifying your work schedule if you anticipate this may be a regular or recurring event, utilizing features of a flexible work schedule (if you have been approved for such a work schedule), or requesting the use of annual leave, accumulated compensatory time off or credit hours, or previously approved time off as an award to make up for the time that you are late.

Flexible work schedules are encouraged to be utilized for varying arrival and departure times for employees and managers given the adjustments made to public transportation schedules/routes that may have been impacted due to COVID-19. Please seek consultation from the servicing Human Resources Office for assistance to address situations that cannot be accommodated.