



# State of Alaska

## COVID-19 Return to the Office / Work Site Guidelines

### **Introduction**

The State of Alaska provides services for all Alaskans. We all share in the responsibility of protecting our fellow Alaskans from, and mitigating the spread, of this virus.

COVID-19 spreads by an infected person who coughs, sneezes, or talks. Spread can especially occur between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet). It's important to remember COVID-19 can be spread by people who are not showing symptoms.

**With this in mind, every state agency, corporation and department (entities) must develop a Return to the Office/Work Site plan in order to put procedures in place to prevent or reduce the spread of COVID-19 and provide clear guidance for both employees and visitors to state facilities.**

This guidance aims to provide clarity and describes the objectives entities should consider as the state slowly returns employees back to the office or work sites and entities develop return to work plans. A copy of the Return to Office/Work Site Plan must be sent to the Division of Personnel & Labor Relations, Director's office.

### **Developing a Return to the Office / Work Site Plan**

Guiding Principles for Return to Office/Work Site Plans must consider and identify how the entity will:

- continue to provide timely and high-quality public service to the greatest extent possible, while maximizing the safety of employees, customers, and visitors through public health and safety best practices;
- require employees to comply with all required safety and health practices and standards; including requirements that employees do not knowingly expose coworkers and the public to conditions that would jeopardize their health or the health of others;
- identify which employees can and should be returned back to the office/work site;
- continue to explore and promote all possible options to expand telework to accomplish business outcomes through telework, while identifying the work employees must do on premise worksites, and/or a hybrid of the two;
- provide for a phased approach for employees to return to worksites, which ensures entities meet applicable safety objectives as outlined below, including but not limited to the entity's need for and access to cleaning supplies, face coverings, equipment, or other personal protective equipment needed to meet the Return to Office/Work Site Plan;
- where an agency has worksites or operations in more restrictive locations (i.e. rural communities or private building/facilities), follow local public health guidelines/mandates, unless otherwise directed by DHSS or the Office of the Governor;
- incorporate social distancing standards, occupancy/capacity limits and guidelines, and provide for hand washing, face-coverings, employee education, and entities response guidelines for ill employees.

**Entities should identify and prioritize which positions to return to the office/work site and which positions will continue to telework.**

To the extent entities need to have employees who are currently teleworking return to the worksite, or have identified positions or duties which cannot be performed remotely, entities should provide for a safe reintegration of those employees under a Return to Office/Work Site Plan. Each Plan should identify service delivery needs to determine what part of the workforce can be maintained via telework and/or needs to return to the worksite and when. The Plan must also describe how the entity will implement safety measures to prepare employees, customers, and visitors to return to the premises safely.

As entities move to increase in-office, on-site work and to scale back the use of teleworking, the phased-in approach must take into consideration the factors set forth below such as the duties performed relative to social distancing guidelines, office/building capacity, hand washing facilities on-site, PPE needs (if required) and availability, etc.

**Return to Office / Work Site Plan**

**1. Return to Office/Work Site Plans must provide guidance on social distancing requirements for on-site employees and visitors, including:**

- identifying ways the employer will endeavor to maintain at least six feet of space between co-workers and the public, and where social distancing is not possible, take appropriate steps to assure that any intrusion into another person's area is limited as much as possible;
- educating staff and visitors on social distancing requirements by, for example, emphasizing that employees and visitors should not ride in an elevator with another person or pause to talk to a coworker or a member of the public, unless everyone can remain six feet apart;
- explaining how the entity intends to utilize other protective measures to support the lack of social distancing in an office including, for example, the use of physical barriers to enhance spacing between office workspaces and block sneezes and coughs;
- specifically address the use of face coverings. (more information on face coverings is provided below);
- providing protocols and guidance pertaining to group or social gatherings of multiple employees;
- avoid gatherings of any size by taking shifts to eat meals, perform activities, or take a break;
- when two or more people must meet in person, they must have at least six feet between them;
- To achieve social distancing the following methods maybe applied:
  - reducing the number of employees, customers, and business partners at the worksite at a given time;
  - controlling movement through common area points, elevators, stairwells, bathrooms, kitchens, and other limited space areas to maintain social distancing standards;
  - the use of face coverings in any smaller, common use, and high-trafficked areas;
  - where applicable entities should encourage and allow for employees to have more flexibility in worksites (such as telework) and hours (staggered shifts);

- increasing physical space in office spaces, flexible meeting options (video- or phone-based meetings) are all ways to support physical distancing.
- for visitors in state facilities, visual prompts in public-facing facilities can help remind members of the public to maintain six feet of distance from employees and each other while waiting in lines.
- further guidance on social distancing and other safety procedures is available on the [Reopen Alaska Responsibly](#) page, including [specific guidance available](#) for the current phase III/IV of reopening.

**2. Return to Office/Work Site Plans must provide guidance on handwashing, including:**

- employers must provide and maintain adequate handwashing supplies and instruct all employees to frequently and adequately wash hands;
- employers must encourage employees to leave their workstations and wash their hands regularly, before and after all client or visitor interactions, before and after going to the bathroom, before and after eating, and after coughing, sneezing, or blowing their nose;
- employers should distribute hand sanitizer throughout the office location;
- employers should consider increasing the number of hand sanitizing stations throughout the facility or worksite;
- employers must replenish cleaning supplies frequently;
- there should be handwashing or hand sanitizing supplies in the immediate area of any break room, water cooler, coffee or other drinks area, in vehicles, and other shared areas where employees eat or drink. Cleaning supplies should be immediately available next to shared microwaves and other kitchen equipment;

**3. Return to Office/Work Site Plans should provide guidance on applicable face covering protocols:**

- all employees, contractors, and visitors to State of Alaska facilities must wear a facemask if social distancing of at least six feet or more between individuals cannot be maintained. This applies to entryways, hallways, stairwells, elevators, enclosed parking areas, and personal offices where a six-foot distance cannot be exercised.\*

*\*Alternatives to this mandate may be possible for members of public accessing state programs or services who are unable to wear a mask due to a condition or impairment that prevents them from safely or properly wearing a mask and for young children. In these cases, managers should seek alternative preventive measures. State employees with a condition or impairment that preclude the wearing of cloth face coverings should consult with their managers or human resources. Additionally, Division and Department Title I and Title II ADA Coordinators as well as the State ADA Coordinator are available for assistance. See <http://doa.alaska.gov/ada/documents/dept-ada-coordinators.pdf>.*

- The state will provide face coverings to employees who do not have and is requiring all staff to wear them.

**Please note:** *This guidance is based on what we know about the role respiratory droplets play in the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19, paired with emerging evidence from clinical and laboratory studies that shows cloth face coverings reduce the spray of droplets when worn over the nose and mouth. COVID-19 spreads mainly among people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet), so the use of cloth face*

*coverings is particularly important in settings where people are close to each other or where social distancing is difficult to maintain. Your department may make a combined request for masks at your facilities by contacting [2020\\_COVID-19@ak-prepared.com](mailto:2020_COVID-19@ak-prepared.com).*

- departments, divisions, or workplace settings may have their own workplace mask policy to minimize the risk of transmission given the nature of their work or work place;
- staff that interfaces with public, especially when social distancing cannot be maintained must wear a mask/face covering;
- the broad guidance and considerations above regarding face coverings does not apply to position specific requirements regarding personal protective equipment (PPE). Employers should keep in mind that certain positions may require the use of respirators or other PPE to meet specific workplace safety needs (for example, the use of respirators in the health care field).

**4. Return to Office/Work Site Plans should provide for employee education, including:**

- basic information regarding safety guidelines for returning to the office/work site and about coronavirus, including but not limited to the following:
- the signs, symptoms and risk factors associated with the COVID-19 illness. This information is available on the CDC and DHSS website. In particular, employees should be reminded that fever, cough, shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue, loss of smell, and loss of taste are common symptoms of COVID-19;
- what to do if they experience any of these symptoms (e.g. do not come to work, contact their supervisor, etc.);
- self-check health tools and the importance of self-checking for illness prior to coming to work;
- how to prevent the spread of the coronavirus while at work, including by taking steps in the workplace to establish social distancing, frequent handwashing, and other precautions;
- the importance of hand washing and how to effectively wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds;
- proper respiratory etiquette, including covering coughs and sneezes, and not touching eyes, noses, or mouths with unwashed hands or gloves;
- requirement for employees to wear a face covering;
- the importance of frequently cleaning and disinfecting commonly touched objects and surfaces such as work stations, keyboards, telephones, machines, and doorknobs;
- where to access necessary disinfectant and cleaning supplies for their workstations.

The information should also include details that help the employee understand what to expect when they return to the worksite. This includes:

- screening requirements (if applicable);
- changes to workstation or office/work site protocol;
- employee responsibility to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and ensure a respectful workplace culture.

**5. Return to Office/ Work Site Plans should include guidance on health checks, assuring that:**

- employees are asked to voluntarily pre-screen (self-check) for illness prior to entering state facilities. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure to the virus and may range from mild to severe. The CDC provides a [list of possible COVID-19 symptoms and a self-check tool for individuals on this page](#), and [general information on protecting oneself and others here](#). Many questions surrounding employee illness are also discussed in this [CDC FAQ for general business operations](#).
- employees who are ill should be required to stay home or go home if they feel or appear ill;
- when required/appropriate, screen employees for signs/symptoms of COVID-19 at the start of the work shift. Identify and isolate workers who exhibit signs or symptoms of COVID-19 illness (more information on screening is provided below);
- temporarily close off all areas where an employee worked who has is suspected of having or who has been confirmed to have COVID-19 or could have touched the surfaces until you have adhered to the cleaning and disinfection guidelines set by the CDC or DHSS;
- keep workers away from areas being deep-cleaned;

**6. As appropriate, Return to Office/Work Site Plans should provide for screening workers:**

- when work requires high-contact (less than 6 feet distancing) or congregate settings, such as employees working in assisted living facilities, group homes, adult care facilities, educational institutions, detention centers, and prisons, screening can be a useful tool to help minimize the spread of COVID-19. An example is taking steps to not introduce COVID to high risk individuals living in high risk environments, as found in long term care and assisted living facilities.
- to determine if an employee who works in the above conditions is appropriate for onsite screening, work with your department's HR staff.
- screening practices may vary from requiring employees, visitors, or business partners to answer limited questions related to signs of COVID symptoms/exposure, and/or temperature checks, or completing a self-screening questionnaire;
- plans should make clear that when an employee, visitor, or business partner has affirmed, through the screening process, that they have no symptoms, they are granted access consistent with the facility or property standards for social distancing, face coverings, PPE, and other safety measures.
- When an employee, visitor, or business partner has affirmed they have experienced a qualifying symptom(s) as identified in the screening process, they will be denied access to the facility or property.

**7. Return to Office/Work Site Plans should provide guidance on how to respond to employees who are ill or refuse to be screened and when ill employees may safely return to the work site:**

- if an employee, visitor, or business partner refuses to participate in the screening process, they will not be allowed access to the worksite. Each agency has unique circumstances to

consider when managing this situation. A Return to Office/Work Site Plan should assure that an entity's response protocol is in place to address this situation. Work with your HR staff when establishing protocol.

- If an employer determines an employee should not report to or be permitted to remain on the work site, the employer should engage in a conversation with the employee and determine if telework options are available. Telework options should be the priority. If the employee is denied access based on screening, the employer will exhaust telework options for an employee before requiring the employee to take leave.
- If telework options are available and the employee can perform those duties, the employer should send the employee home with telework.
- If there are no telework options, consult with your department HR staff on how to proceed. If the employee is subsequently diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus, the agency should advise the employee about other state and federal leave options that are available, depending on the circumstances.
- If the employee had been diagnosed with COVID, the employee may not return to work until they have been officially released from isolation by public health.
- If the employee had suspected COVID that was not laboratory confirmed, the employee may not return to work until at least 10 days have passed since symptom onset and resolution of fever for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing medications, and with improvement of other symptoms.
- If the employee is a close contact to a known person with COVID as defined by public health they must:
  - Quarantine for 14 days from the employee's suspected exposure **Or**;
  - The CDC does provide guidance for critical infrastructure workers for modifications of quarantine that include other mitigation efforts and testing to minimize the risk of spread of COVID during quarantine can found here:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/worker-safety-support/hd-testing.html>
- If an employee is ill at work, then subsequently diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus. Each agency has unique circumstances to consider when managing this situation. A Return to the Office/Work Site Plan should assure that an entity's response protocol is in place to address this situation. Work with your HR staff when establishing protocol.

### **Testing Employees**

Due to the limited testing resources, currently the state only requires testing of employees working in assisted living facilities (Pioneer Homes) and employees working on the ferries. If state employees would like to be tested, they should contact their health care provider to determine whether a test is indicated.

### **Additional Resources**

We would also like to introduce you to Alaska's ***COVID Conscious Business Toolkit***. These materials were developed in a collaborative process with other agencies and organizations, including the Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development. The toolkit supports Alaska businesses in promoting specific precautions, such as physical distancing and

mask wearing, and many of the resources are easily transferrable for use in our facilities. Signs, flyers and digital graphics to improve employee knowledge on COVID-19 symptoms, promote social distancing, and support mask wearing are available to download.

Lastly, a link to the [DHSS Alert Levels webpage](#) is under Guidance and Resources on the [DHSS COVID homepage](#) to help guide decision-making at the regional level. The footnote below the table provides a link to the dashboard location where region-specific levels are located.

By following these guidelines and using the resources provided here, we can all do our part to help protect every Alaskan, especially those who are at a greater risk for intensive care, ventilator use, and death from this virus.

