



Social Security Administration (SSA)

COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan

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In accordance with the [Office of Management and Budget's \(OMB\) Safer Federal Workplace: Agency Model Safety Principles memorandum \(M-21-15\)](#) on the [President's Executive Order on Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask-Wearing](#), we have created a Workplace Safety Plan. The safety protocols we put in place in July 2020 and outlined in this plan address the model safety principles in OMB Memorandum M-21-15. This plan is a living document. We will update it to incorporate guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and OMB.

We manage a network of about 1,500 offices nationwide. About 1,200 of these offices provide a wide-range of direct services to local communities. Prior to the pandemic, these offices served over 800,000 visitors a week, many of whom arrived at our offices without an appointment.

Since March 2020, most employees have worked remotely to serve the public primarily through our online services or over the phone. Currently, we welcome over 10,000 visitors a week to our offices by appointment only for a critical issue that we are unable to address over the phone. We took this step to protect our employees and the public we serve, many of whom—given the nature of our programs—are aged or have disabilities placing them at increased risk for serious COVID-19 outcomes. In addition to serving a limited number of customers onsite, a minimum number of staff report onsite when necessary to handle non-portable work including opening and scanning mail, which provides work for our remote employees.

For additional details on our COVID-19 pandemic policies, employees and managers may visit our [internal COVID-19 website](#). The public can find detailed information about how we are operating during the pandemic by [visiting our COVID-19 webpage](#). We encourage the public to subscribe to this page to receive updates.

Health and Safety

Telework and Remote Work

We have maximized telework and are performing all portable work remotely. Our information technology solutions support secure remote work. We have a small number of employees and managers working in offices to handle workloads that must be done in the offices, such as managing facilities and security, information technology, limited appointments for critical issues or if SSA needs to review original documents, handling mail, and scanning paper documents into our systems for remote workers. Portable and non-portable work will be completed onsite. While evacuated pursuant to 5 CFR § 550.409, AFGE employees will not be called back into the office to do "portable" workloads but AFGE employees who were called back to do "non-portable" work may be asked to work on "portable" workloads in situations where all "non-portable" workloads have been completed and the time frames are such that sending the employee(s) home to complete their day would not be an efficient use of time. We continue to identify electronic solutions, where possible, for non-portable work.

COVID-19 Coordination Teams

The Office of the Commissioner will continue to provide oversight and coordination and will hold weekly meetings with a multidiscipline cross-agency team of human resources, medical, legal, program operations, facilities, and health and safety experts in accordance with OMB memo M-21-15 guidance. We will continue to consult with experts in other agencies including the CDC and General Services Administration (GSA). We will make operating decisions consistent with OMB memo M-21-15.

Face Masks

We will continue to follow CDC guidance at [Your Guide to Masks | CDC](#) and [Use Masks to Help Slow Spread | CDC](#). We require anyone entering our offices to wear a face mask compliant with CDC guidance. We do not allow non-compliant/novelty/non-protective masks or face shields absent a mask. We provide our employees who return to our offices with an initial supply of cloth face masks obtained through the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency. We provide face masks to members of the public if they arrive without one. We require face masks even in areas where barriers are in place, in addition to requiring physical distancing. Face masks may only be removed when away from other people in order to eat or drink.

We communicated all safety policies to employees via email in July 2020 and managers remind employees of these policies when employees are in the office. We maintain a COVID-19 intranet site with management and employee Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). We have signage about our safety measures in all offices. Members of the public may currently come into our offices by appointment only, and we explain our safety policies when we arrange the appointment. Upon arrival, the public will see signage reminding them of our safety measures. Security guards will ensure the visitor is wearing a mask and reviews the posted self-health check. We emailed contractor COVID-19 FAQs, which explain our safety policies, to Contracting Officer Representatives in July 2020.

Note: Exceptions to the face mask policy include visitors under 2 years old. Visits to our offices are by appointment only. When scheduling the appointment, we will confirm that the visitor is able to wear a face mask. If the visitor reports being unable to wear a face mask, management will make alternative service plans (e.g., telephone service, contactless document drop off etc.) and consult with the Medical Office (MO) for guidance, as necessary. If an employee reports being unable to wear a face mask due to a medical reason, the manager will review the management COVID-19 FAQ and engage the reasonable accommodation process. If an employee reports being unable to wear a face mask for a religious reason, the manager will engage the religious accommodation process and consult the Office of General Counsel (OGC).

Testing

Currently, we do not require testing for our employees, contractors, or visitors. We await guidance on testing for federal employees.

Contact Tracing

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.

Travel

Personal Travel

The CDC has extensive guidelines for both domestic and international travel, and employees should consult these resources carefully before deciding to undertake personal travel. We encourage employees who have on-site work requirements and responsibilities and will be taking leave to travel for personal reasons to contact their supervisors prior to traveling to discuss leave and telework, as they will need to self-quarantine prior to coming on-site. Employees engaging in personal travel should carefully assess travel risk prior to travel, wear a mask during all portions of a trip, maintain physical distance from non-household members, maintain good hand hygiene by regularly washing hands with soap and water, or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available, and stay home after higher-risk travel before returning to the workplace. Employees and managers may refer to our COVID-19 FAQs.

Official Government Travel

We have paused all international travel and most domestic travel. In accordance with OMB and CDC guidance, domestic travel is limited to mission critical work that cannot be handled remotely, generally urgent health and safety actions. Employees must get supervisory approval for mission-critical travel. Employees returning from mission critical travel who have on-site work requirements and responsibilities should discuss appropriate quarantine/isolation requirements and timeframes, as well as telework and other leave options as they will need to self-quarantine prior to coming onsite.

Employees who wish to travel should consult the following resources:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/after-travel-precautions.html>
- https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-during-covid19.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Ftravelers%2Ftravel-in-the-us.html
- <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html/>

Travel by Visitors

In our appointment screening process, we ask visitors if they have traveled internationally within the 14 days prior to the appointment, and we reschedule the appointment or make alternate service arrangements if the answer is yes. Land travel (e.g., between the United States and Canada or Mexico via car, bus, ferry, or train) is exempt from the 14-day screening requirement.

Symptom Monitoring

We require self-health checks for anyone entering our offices. We share the screening criteria in advance with visitors, employees, and contractors and we post the information at all entrances to SSA facilities:

The self-health check includes the following questions:

Do you have any symptoms of COVID-19, including:

- Cough or sore throat
- Fever (100.4 degrees or higher)
- Chills
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Muscle pain or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Gastrointestinal symptoms like nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea

Within the last 14 days, have you:

- Been diagnosed with COVID-19,
- Received instructions from a public health authority (local health authority, medical professional, etc.) to self-monitor for symptoms or self-quarantine,
- Traveled outside the country, or
- To your knowledge, been in close physical contact (within six feet) with a person who was diagnosed with COVID-19 within 14 days of your contact with them?

Prior to reporting to the worksite daily, employees, contractors, and security guards must assess their health status using the checklist above. Employees who meet any of the self-screening criteria must contact their supervisor for instructions including whether remote work is possible. Additionally, when an employee who is already in the office presents with COVID-19 symptoms, managers must report the case to our MO and direct the employee to return home.

For customers with appointments at SSA, at the time we schedule the appointment, we explain the self-screening and face mask requirements. If a customer answers yes to any of the screening criteria, we will decline the appointment and work with the customer to provide service via phone, online, or schedule a future in-person visit. When visitors with appointments arrive, the security guard will confirm verbally that visitors performed the self-screening, do not meet any of the criteria, and are wearing a face mask. If necessary, guards will direct visitors to wear a face mask provided by SSA. If a visitor is unable or unwilling to comply, the guard will not allow entry and will refer the person to call the phone number posted on the entrance signage and a manager will assist the customer.

Quarantine and Isolation

Employees who have been diagnosed with or are suspected to have COVID-19 may not report onsite until they have met the CDC guidelines for ending isolation. When possible, these employees may work remotely.

Employees who have had close contact with someone who is diagnosed with COVID-19, or ordered by a doctor to self-quarantine due to suspected COVID-19 will not report to the office. Their managers will consult with the MO for guidance in accordance with CDC recommendations.

Confidentiality

We do not collect or store information from self-health checks. We instruct our managers to keep any necessary medical information secure and separate from employee personnel files. Our policies are consistent with [EEOC guidance](#). Managers may send any questions concerning medical information to our MO for guidance. Our MO consults with our OGC as necessary on privacy and disclosure questions.

We will continue to monitor and implement CDC recommendations.

Workplace Operations

Occupancy

No SSA workplace should operate above 25% of normal occupancy standards at any time during periods of high community prevalence or transmission. Exceptions to this policy will be cleared by the Commissioner, through the SSA COVID-19 Coordination Team and in consultation with the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force. Exceptions may only be submitted by a Deputy Commissioner and should consider measures like cohorts and staggered work schedules as appropriate.

Occupancy is currently controlled by management and approved onsite workload plans. SSA offices remain closed to all individuals except those approved by management including both employees and a limited number of visitors with scheduled appointments. SSA will continue to monitor access reports.

Safety protocols must be in place in offices. Consistent with CDC guidance and OMB Memorandum M-21-15 and as of July 20, 2020, these safety protocols continue to include:

- Offices must have soap, sanitizer, and cleaning supplies.
- Protective barriers installed in public interviewing areas.
- All employees, contractors, and visitors must wear masks and do a health self-screening before entering SSA facilities.
- All employees, contractors, and visitors must practice physical distancing of at least 6 feet when in the office.
- While not required, gloves are available.

- Offices have placed signage on entrances and around the office on safety protocols.
- All employees working in an office must take training on hand washing and proper usage of masks.

Physical Distancing

We require physical distancing of at least six feet in our offices in line with CDC guidance: [Social Distancing \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/socialdistancing/). We have removed or blocked seating, reconfigured space, and placed signage on elevators to enforce this policy. We have also installed plastic barriers in areas where we are interviewing the public and required managers to measure the seating between visitors and interviewers to ensure the 6-foot distance wherever possible. We have implemented contactless handoffs for work processes (e.g., exchanging work at drop-off tables) to eliminate employee-to-employee contact. We have also reduced the duration of face-to-face interaction (e.g., begun an appointment by phone and completed it in-person) between employees and visitors when possible.

Environmental Cleaning

SSA employees returning to agency worksites must complete the agency training on cleaning and disinfection awareness. We direct our managers to the CDC publication entitled [Cleaning and Disinfecting your Facility](#).

In general:

- If no exposures have been identified in the facility, normal cleaning protocols, enhanced to include high-touch areas, apply.
- If a suspected or confirmed exposure has occurred, we follow an enhanced cleaning protocol in accordance with CDC guidance, airing out the space for 24 hours first, whenever possible.

SSA will continue coordination with CDC for policy review and onsite observation. We will continue to communicate any updates including the release of this plan to our employees via Commissioner broadcast and to the public on our website. We will consult with our stakeholders including Congress, unions, and advocates, as appropriate.

Hygiene

We issued guidance to our employees to remind them of the importance of hand washing in protecting themselves from COVID-19. We provided instruction and signage on the proper way to wash including washing for at least 20 seconds. We included instructions on using an alcohol-based [hand sanitizer](#) with at least 60 percent alcohol if washing with soap and water is not an option. To open, an office must have an adequate supply of hand sanitizer, including for public use.

Ventilation and Air Filtration

We have over 1,500 offices in a variety of space configurations, including leased from private landlords, which complicates our ventilation and air filtration options. Our facilities staff examined guidance on ventilation in alignment with CDC, GSA, and American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers publications to determine possible ventilation and filtration enhancements. We are working with GSA regarding recommendations and appropriate and feasible enhancements.

Visitors

Our offices are currently restricting access and are available to the public by appointment only for certain critical services that we cannot handle remotely. We advise visitors of our safety policies including the self-health symptom check and face mask requirement when we schedule an appointment, and we ask the visitor about symptoms upon arrival for an appointment. While we do not require visitors to complete a questionnaire, we do require verbal confirmation upon arrival to our office that the visitor does not answer yes to any of the screening criteria. The public may perform an automated health check by using the [CDC screening tool](#).

Staggered Work Times and Cohort Based Scheduling

To date, generally, we have not returned enough staff to our offices to require staggered work shifts in most locations. We will consider this approach, as needed. Our managers regularly use cohort scheduling when rotating employees between in-office and at-home work and consult our MO, as needed.

Elevators

We have posted signage in SSA controlled spaces to remind everyone to employ physical distancing in elevators. For most elevators, physical distancing limits capacity to one person unless the occupants are already in close contact (e.g., a visitor and the visitor's helper who live together). In locations where SSA cannot control signage, we ask everyone to employ physical distancing. We encourage anyone who is able to use stairs.

Shared Spaces

Signage is posted at entrances to and within SSA offices reminding everyone of our safety policies including masks, hygiene, and physical distancing. We have reconfigured space including common areas, blocked or removed seating and furniture, rerouted walkways, enforced physical distancing and placed sanitizer and cleaning materials near shared equipment. This equipment will be cleaned more frequently and when transferred between different people. SSA will follow [CDC's](#) and [GSA's](#) guidance.