

**County of Alameda**  
**Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)**

**Employee Guidelines**  
**Frequently Asked Questions**

*Updated April 21, 2020*

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## General Information

### **Q.1. What is the 2019-Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and what are its symptoms?**

On February 11, 2020, the World Health Organization announced an official name for the disease that is causing the 2019 novel coronavirus outbreak. The new name of this disease is coronavirus disease 2019, abbreviated as COVID-19. Formerly, this disease was referred to as “2019 novel coronavirus” or “2019-nCoV”. There are [many types](#) of human coronaviruses, including some that commonly cause mild upper-respiratory tract illnesses. COVID-19 is a new disease, caused by a novel (or new) coronavirus that has not previously been seen in humans. As of April 2020, this new virus has resulted in over a million cases worldwide.

The number of cases of COVID-19 being reported in the United States is rising due to increased laboratory testing and reporting across the country. The growing number of cases in part reflects the rapid spread of COVID-19 as many U.S. states and territories experience community spread.

Symptoms of confirmed cases of the COVID-19 have ranged from people with little to no symptoms to people being severely ill and dying. Symptoms can include mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Some emergency warning signs include: trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion or inability to arouse, and bluish lips or face. Over 80 percent of individuals have mild disease.

### **Q.2. How does the virus spread?**

There is evidence of increasing circulation of COVID-19 in our region. Older people and people with certain underlying health conditions like heart disease, lung disease and diabetes, for example, may be at greater risk of serious illness.

It is currently believed that the virus is spread mainly from person-to-person by people who are in close contact with one another (within approximately 6-feet) and via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory pathogens spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or can be inhaled into the lungs.

People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic. However, the spread might be possible before people show symptoms as there have been reports of this occurring, although it is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

### **Q.3. Who is at risk for serious illness from the virus?**

Some persons are at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19. Those considered at higher risk include:

- People over 65 years of age.
- People, regardless of age, with underlying health conditions including chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma, serious heart conditions, severe obesity, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, liver disease, as well as those who are immunocompromised due to cancer, HIV, etc.

**Q.4. What can I do to protect myself and those around me?**

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the following:

- **Stay home from work if you are ill.** Consult your personal physician if you have a fever. Remain off work until you have been fever-free for at least 72 hours, at least 7 days have passed since your symptoms first appeared and your symptoms have improved.
- Maintain at least 6-foot social distance from others.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a disposable tissue, if available.
- Wear a cloth face covering.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, mouth, and cloth face covering.
- Get your flu shot to protect against flu or symptoms similar to COVID-19.
- Wash your hands often with liquid soap and water and rub for at least 20 seconds.
- Use a personal hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Keep sick family members at home until symptoms resolve.

**Q.5. What is the County doing in terms of cleaning and disinfecting to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace?**

The General Services Agency (GSA) continues to work with agencies/departments to increase availability and distribution of disinfectant supplies. Janitorial Services has increased the frequency of wiping down common area surfaces and is utilizing Waxie 700 Disinfectant to sanitize these areas. All janitors have been fully trained to disinfect and sanitize using proper cleaning techniques and appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). If an area requires a decontamination, employees should contact their supervisor or designee to notify GSA janitorial staff.

## Shelter in Place

**Q.6. What does it mean to Shelter in Place (SIP)?**

On March 16, 2020, the County Interim Health Officer declared a local public health emergency for the County and [issued an Order](#) (SIP Order) for residents to shelter in place, the cessation of all non-essential services and travel, as well as setting Social Distancing Requirements, for three (3) weeks beginning on March 17, 2020 through April 7, 2020. On March 31, 2020, the County's Interim Health Officer issued [Order No. 20-04](#) (SIP Order Extension) extending the SIP Order through May 3, 2020 and imposed additional restrictions and requirements.

## Essential Services

**Q.7. What are “Essential” vs. “Non-Essential” services and who makes that determination?**

Essential services are services and functions that are necessary to maintain continuity of operations (COOP) whereas Non-Essential services are not necessary to maintain COOP

as determined by the Agency/Department Heads. The determinations may change due to evolving COVID-19 conditions. Employees who perform Essential work are required to report to work (or telework) to maintain COOP.

**Q.8. Can an employee's work assignment determination change from Non-Essential to Essential and vice-versa?**

Yes, Agency/Department Heads will continue to assess the Non-Essential and/or Essential functions, and employees who can perform such functions based on operational needs and evolving COVID-19 conditions.

**Q.9. Can employees telework?**

Agency/Department Heads may elect and are encouraged to allow employees, determined on a case-by-case basis, to telework (work from home) temporarily either in a full time or part time capacity if operationally feasible. There is no entitlement for employees to telework.

**Q.10. What is the process for employees to report a workplace injury when they are teleworking?**

The process for reporting an injury sustained while teleworking shall remain the same as reporting an injury sustained in the workplace. If you are unsure of your Agency/Department process for reporting a workplace injury, consult your Agency/Department Human Resources contact.

**Q.11. If I am required to work in the office, is there a possibility to rotate coverage?**

The possibility to rotate coverage in the office will be determined by the Agency/Department Head.

## **Disaster Service Work**

**Q.12. What is a Disaster Service Worker (DSW)?**

By law, all County employees (including part-time and temporary) are designated as DSWs and are required to respond during disasters and emergencies. Employees may be released from their usual duties to be reassigned to assist any agency/department or organization in carrying out its emergency response duties. Employees acting as DSWs will be assigned duties within their scope of training, skill, and ability.

**Q.13. If a Temporary Assignment Pool (TAP) employee performs work that is deemed Non-Essential can the employee be called back to work while the SIP Order Extension is in effect?**

Yes. The TAP program exists to provide staffing for services on an as-needed basis. Agency/Department Heads have defined Essential services. If additional staff are needed to perform Essential services, any TAP employees who are qualified may be called back to service to allow the County to perform Essential services, notwithstanding the fact that a particular employee may have performed non-Essential services prior to the SIP Order.

## Wearing a Face Covering at Work

**Q.14. Am I required to wear a face covering at work?**

Yes, unless you are covered by the health exemption. The County's Interim Health Officer issued [Order No. 20-08](#) (FC Order) on April 17, 2020 stipulating the following:

A face covering must be worn in three (3) main settings:

- Essential businesses, or other businesses and facilities engaged in Minimum basic Operations, Essential Infrastructure, or Essential Government Functions;
- When seeking health care (health care workers and facilities have a different set of requirements);
- Public transportation or other types of shared transportation.

**Q.15. Will the County provide me with a face covering?**

While we expect that many of you will want to wear your own face covering, the County will provide disposable face coverings at each worksite for our employees and others conducting business in County facilities to facilitate compliance with the FC Order. For those interested in creating your own face covering, a helpful link describing how to make and wear a face covering is provided, below, at Q.17.

**Q.16. If I choose to use my own face covering, what types are considered acceptable?**

An acceptable face covering is made of cloth, fabric, or other soft or permeable material, without holes, and covers the nose and mouth and surrounding areas of the lower face. As noted in the FC Order, examples of face coverings include: a scarf, bandana, neck gaiter, a homemade covering made from a T-shirt or sweatshirt, or towel held on with rubber bands. Use good judgment and select a face covering that is appropriate in the workplace.

**Q.17. Is there guidance describing how to properly wear or make cloth face coverings?**

Yes. The following link provides direct guidance from the CDC:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

**Q.18. My understanding was that we were not required to wear a face covering before, but now we are. What changed?**

Public health officials continue to learn more about COVID-19 and share that knowledge with our community. The face covering was not previously recommended for the general public for COVID-19 protection, only for those individuals who were symptomatic to prevent them from spreading the virus. However, because individuals may be contagious and spread COVID-19 without their knowledge, even if they do not have symptoms, the prudent and cautious approach is to recommend face coverings be worn by the general population.

Wearing a face covering may ultimately help prevent the spread of droplets that may be infectious.

**Q.19. How long is the FC Order in place?**

Currently, there is no end date. The FC Order is in place until it is extended, rescinded, superseded, or amended in writing by the County's Interim Health Officer.

**Q.20. I have health-related concerns with wearing a face covering. Am I still required to wear one?**

Exceptions to the requirement will be made as set forth in the FC Order. Per the FC Order, a face covering is not required if:

- a) a medical professional has advised that wearing a face covering may pose a risk to the person wearing it for health-related reasons;
- b) wearing a face covering would create a risk to the person related to their work as determined by local, state, or federal regulators or workplace safety guidelines;
- c) a face covering should not be worn by someone who has trouble breathing or is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the face covering without assistance.

**Q.21. Do I need to provide documentation and to whom do I present the documentation to be exempt from the FC Order requiring the wearing of a face covering?**

Yes. Documentation from a medical provider should be provided to your supervisor.

**Q.22. Will I be required to go home if I report to work without a face covering?**

The FC Order states that, "Employees, contractors, owners, and volunteers in all these settings (see Q.14 above) *must wear a face covering* where the public is present or likely will be, and at any time when others are nearby." [Emphasis added.] If you report to work without a face covering, you will be required to wear one of the face coverings provided to you by the County upon entering the workplace where you will encounter other employees in spaces such as hallways, elevators and stairways.

**Q.23. Are members of the public required to wear a face covering?**

Yes. Per the FC Order, members of the public have a requirement to wear a face covering while inside of or waiting in line to enter the business, facility, or location, including government offices.

**Q.24. Am I required to wear a face covering when I am alone inside my office?**

A face covering is not required when a person is in their personal office (a single room) when others are not present as long as the public does not regularly visit the room. Further, a face covering is also not required if the employee works in a space that is not regularly visited by the public (plumber, accountant, electrician etc.), but that employee must wear a face covering when coworkers are nearby, when being visited by a client/customer, and anywhere members of the public or other coworkers are regularly present.

**Q.25. If I wear a face covering may I discontinue the existing requirements of frequent handwashing and maintaining social distancing of six feet?**

No. Wearing a face covering is one tool for reducing the spread of the virus but doing so is not a substitute for hand-washing and social distancing. All three practices must continue.

**Q.26. I have a face covering that covers my entire face. May I wear that to work?**

No. A covering that hides or obscures the wearer's eyes or forehead is NOT an acceptable face covering.

**Q.27. Am I required to wear a face covering when I am alone in my car driving to work?**

No. The FC Order does not require any person to wear a face covering while driving alone, or exclusively with other members of the same household.

**Q.28. Is there a penalty for not complying with the FC Order?**

Yes. Failure to comply with the FC Order constitutes an imminent threat and immediate menace to public health, constitutes a public nuisance, and is punishable by fine, imprisonment, or both.

## **COVID-19 Paid Administrative Leave: March 17, 2020 - April 7, 2020**

**Q.29. What is COVID-19 Paid Administrative Leave (COVID-19 PAL) and its effective period?**

On March 17, 2020, the Board of Supervisors authorized COVID-19 Paid Administrative Leave (COVID-19 PAL) for employees impacted by COVID-19 for the time period covering March 17, 2020 through April 7, 2020, which corresponds with the March 16, 2020 SIP Order issued by the County Interim Health Officer. Eligible employees who were absent due to a qualifying reason during this time period will receive COVID-19 PAL by coding their time with the time reporting code of "ERR", which is considered being on paid status. During the time an employee is on COVID-19 PAL, the employee will continue to receive all benefits associated with being on paid status, such as receiving normal leave accruals, time counted towards next step increases, seniority, and County service time. The amount of time available will be based on the number of regular hours the employee is scheduled to work and would have worked if not for a COVID-19 related reason.

**Q.30. Who is eligible to take COVID-19 PAL?**

Most County employees (including part-time and temporary) are eligible to take COVID-19 PAL however, the following **exceptions** apply:

- Retired annuitants.
- Employees who have been on authorized leave without pay (time reporting code LWO) prior to February 1, 2020, unless the employee is unable to work during the time period of March 17, 2020 through April 7, 2020 due to COVID-19 related reasons and requested to be placed on COVID-19 PAL by contacting their Agency/Department HR contact.
- Employees who are on 4850.
- Employees who are on general paid administrative leave for other reasons (pending investigation, disciplinary matter, etc.) unless approved to return to work (related to their placement).
- Worker's compensation medical appointments.
- An employee's time associated with their receipt of State Disability Insurance (SDI), Paid Family Leave (PFL) or Temporary Disability Benefits (TTD). However, the leave an employee would use to supplement their time while on SDI, PFL or TTD would be eligible under COVID-19 PAL.



**Q.31. Will COVID-19 PAL count towards the employee's probationary period?**

It depends on the length and amount of time the employee is absent on COVID-19 PAL. Per Civil Service Commission Rule 1820 G, your probationary period will be extended for the amount of time taken if you are off on leave with pay for two (2) consecutive work weeks or more. Intermittent time off during the workweek would not trigger this provision, as you would not be out for two (2) consecutive weeks.

**Q.32. Is an employee required to call-in every day while on COVID-19 PAL?**

No. However, the employee must remain available during regularly scheduled work hours and given that as County employees, we are all Disaster Service Workers. If an employee is off due to illness or another reason for leave, the employee must notify their supervisor when they have recovered and are eligible to return to work, either on site or working remotely.

**Q.33. If an employee is out ill for three (3) days or more, will the agency/department issue Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) information after the 3<sup>rd</sup> day absence.**

Yes, if the absence is for an FMLA/California Family Rights Act (CFRA) covered reason.

**Q.34. If an employee is on approved leave under FMLA or CFRA, but not receiving SDI or PFL and is either using their own leave or on FMLA Leave Without Pay (time reporting code LWF) and the leave continues during the March 17, 2020 through April 7, 2020 time period, will they remain on FMLA or CFRA, using their own leave or on FMLA leave without pay?**

The employee will be placed on FMLA COVID-19 PAL (time reporting code FER) for the duration of their approved FMLA or CFRA leave during the time period covering March 17, 2020 through April 7, 2020. If the employee's FMLA or CFRA leave ends during said time period, the employee will return to work unless determined otherwise by the Agency/Department Head. If the employee is not able to return to work due to a COVID-19 related reason, the employee will be placed on COVID-19 PAL (ERR) from the date the FMLA/CFRA ends through April 7, 2020.

**Q.35. If an employee is on SDI, PFL or TTD benefits during the timeframe of March 17, 2020 through April 7, 2020, will they remain on SDI, PFL or TTD, respectively?**

The employee will remain on SDI, PFL or TTD benefits during the timeframe of March 17, 2020 through April 7, 2020 and their remaining time will be supplemented with COVID-19 PAL. The COVID-19 PAL time that is supplemented should be equivalent to what would otherwise be supplemented by the employees' regular leave balances or leave without pay if not for the COVID-19 PAL.

**Q.36. If an employee is working out-of-class and receiving higher job code pay, will they continue to receive the higher job code pay if placed on COVID-19 PAL?**

An employee shall continue to receive higher job code pay while on COVID-19 PAL in accordance with their respective MOU provision related to paid leave. If the respective MOU does not reference higher job code pay related to paid leave or the employee is unrepresented, the employee shall receive the higher job code pay while on paid leave for no more than five (5) days in any pay period. Any paid leave in excess of the five (5) days

in any pay period shall be compensated at the employee's regular, non-out-of-class pay rate.

Further, if an employee is regularly in a 75-hour per pay period position and is working out-of-class in an 80-hour per pay period position, the employee shall not receive overtime hours under such circumstances as the employee is not actually working the additional hours.

**Q.37. If an employee is on catastrophic sick leave, will their time be converted to COVID-19 PAL?**

Yes, if an employee has been placed on catastrophic sick leave, their time will be converted to COVID-19 PAL for the timeframe during March 17, 2020 through April 7, 2020.

**Q.38. If an employee attends a workers' compensation medical appointment, will their time be converted to COVID-19 PAL?**

No. The employee's time for their workers' compensation medical appointment will remain coded as W57 to ensure proper tracking of workers' compensation related matters.

**Q.39. If an employee has scheduled vacation during the timeframe March 17, 2020 through April 7, 2020 to reduce their vacation leave balance, will there be any additional options for them to reduce their vacation cap?**

Employees who had scheduled vacation during the time period covering March 17, 2020 through April 7, 2020, will have their time converted to COVID-19 PAL for the duration of their vacation leave.

There are currently no additional options for employees to reduce their vacation cap. Employees are encouraged to monitor their vacation balance and submit for vacation leaves accordingly to reduce their vacation cap.

## **COVID Administrative Leave (COVAL): March 17, 2020 - April 7, 2020**

**Q.40. What is COVID Administrative Leave (COVAL) and its effective period?**

On March 17, 2020, when the Board of Supervisors authorized COVID-19 PAL (as listed in Q.29. above), they also authorized COVID Administrative Leave (COVAL) to award administrative leave for eligible employees who are required and able to work (or telework), for each hour worked (up to a maximum of 128 hours) during the time period covering March 17, 2020 to April 7, 2020. The hours earned will be awarded and made available on a date to be determined by the County, and its usage is limited to the hours the employee is scheduled and/or assigned to work. Any unused administrative leave will not be paid out and will be forfeited at the end of the two (2) years from the award date, or when the employee terminates from County employment, whichever is sooner.

**Q.41. Who is eligible to earn COVAL?**

Most County employees (including part-time and temporary) are eligible if they worked during the period covering March 17, 2020 through April 7, 2020. Retired annuitants are not eligible for COVAL.

**Q.42. What is the maximum number of COVAL hours (cap) that employees can earn?**

The maximum number of hours that employees can earn is based on their normal work schedule or the hours they are scheduled to work for employees without a normal work schedule. If an employee works the entire period of March 17, 2020 through April 7, 2020, and:

- Their normal work schedule is 75 hours per pay period, they would receive 120 hours of COVAL.
- Their normal work schedule is 80 hours per pay period, they would receive 128 hours of COVAL.

**Q.43. When COVAL becomes available, does the employee need prior approval to use?**

Yes. Consistent with any leave/time off request, COVAL is subject to supervisor/manager approval.

**Q.44. Will interns be awarded COVAL for the time they work during the period covering March 17, 2020 through April 7, 2020?**

Yes. Interns who are on the County's payroll system will be awarded COVAL on an hour-for-hour basis, for each hour worked, during the March 17, 2020 through April 7, 2020 time period up to a maximum of 128 hours (80-hour EE) and 120 hours (75-hour EE). Further, if an intern is scheduled to work but instructed not to report to work on-site (adhering to shelter in place) and is unable to telework during this time period, they will be placed on COVID-19 PAL.

**Q.45. Can an employee donate their awarded COVAL leave to another employee or group of employees?**

Currently, an employee cannot donate their awarded COVAL leave to another employee or group of employees. However, the County has activated the Disaster Service Fund to provide emergency relief for those affected by COVID-19 and employees may donate up to five (5) day of COVAL towards that Fund.

**Disclaimer**

The answers provided are based on current information and are subject to change. This includes changes, due to revisions of federal, state or local law, regulation and/or regulatory agency guidance. Please be sure to check with your Agency/Department Human Resources Office for the latest information.