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Manager FAQ: COVID-19 response

Below are answers for managers and supervisors to frequently asked questions related to COVID-19, also known as coronavirus, and the Met Council's impact and response. This page is a living document and will be updated regularly when we have new information or guidance to share.

If you have questions not answered below, please ask your division head. Or, if you would like to ask anonymously, you can submit your question or comment in [this online form](#). Others may be wondering the same thing, and we will review submissions daily and try to address the question or concern in this FAQ or other upcoming communication.

Click on a question below to jump down to its answer, or scroll through the questions and answers on this page.

Managers and supervisors, please visit the Employee FAQ for complete information. Most of our information that is evolving with the pandemic is housed on the employee page to minimize duplication, as the content is important for both employees and managers/supervisors.

Updated 10-20-2020

COVID-19 Leave policy materials (updated policy effective June 13):

- [COVID-19 Leave policy](#)
- [COVID-19 Leave request form \(PDF\)](#)
- [COVID-19 Leave time codes \(PDF\)](#)
- [Summary of the June 13 changes to the COVID-19 Leave policy \(PDF\)](#)
- [Recording of a Q&A session for managers on the June 13 policy changes \(60 min\)](#)

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1. What should I do as a manager or supervisor to help my employees?

Now is an important time to spend time talking with your employees about how they're feeling and what their concerns are. Prioritize time for this; if possible, try to dedicate time each day to walk around and talk with your employees. Let us know what you hear, and we'll work to find information to address their concerns. You can submit issues you hear through the [online COVID-19 form](#) (anonymously or with your name and email to receive a reply), or you can contact your division director.

2. Will the Met Council implement any changes to our operations?

Met Council operations are in a business-as-usual state; however we have added additional deep cleaning to our buses, trains, and facilities. We are evaluating the situation as it evolves and reviewing pandemic planning and procedures to ensure we have the workforce needed to provide duties.

3. Should we cancel non-essential meetings or switch to virtual meetings?

Out of an abundance of caution, the Met Council's Pandemic Unified Command decided to make changes to our approach to in-person meetings.

We are directing staff to discontinue planning large-scale public gatherings for the next several weeks as this situation continues to evolve. We also ask that you cancel, delay, or reschedule any planned large meetings that are discretionary through April 15. If you have any questions or would like assistance making that decision, consult your division director.

We also recommend that meetings you can have with Met Council staff at other sites and external partners be virtual meetings whenever possible. We have recently implemented tools across the Met Council such as Webex Meetings and Microsoft Teams that facilitate virtual meetings and collaboration. (Both are embedded within the Microsoft Office calendar invitation function.)

As of March 12, the Metropolitan Council, its standing committees, and advisory committees will continue to hold meetings to accomplish time-sensitive business. These meetings will be limited to critical business decisions. Informational presentations will largely be removed from meeting agendas. If a committee does not have timely business items to act on, we will likely cancel those meetings. In accordance with open meeting laws, we will continue to allow the public to attend any meetings that would typically be governed by the Open Meeting Law but will encourage individuals to view our meetings via streaming services if they wish to do so.

Consult with your division director if you have business items for the Council, Council standing committees, and Council advisory committee consideration.

We recommend that you use virtual meeting and collaboration tools where appropriate, including Webex Meetings and Microsoft Teams.

- Webex Meetings: This tool helps streamline video conferencing, screensharing, and conference calls whether you're in a conference room, at your desk computer, or working remotely. [More information on MetNet](#), including an instruction guide. Please email Webex-Support@metc.state.mn.us if you need help setting up Webex Meetings.
- Microsoft Teams: This application is available on all Met Council computers and replaces Skype for Business for instant messaging and adds much more functionality. [More information on MetNet](#), including training videos and quick start guides. Please email ECM@metc.state.mn.us if you need help with Microsoft Teams.

4. Can I allow or encourage my team to work from home?

(Updated 10-20-20)

Guidance from the Governor clearly states that **all employees who are able and authorized to telework must continue to do so**. This was implemented during the initial stay-at-home order in March and will remain part of the state's policy through all of the phases identified in [Minnesota's Stay Safe Plan](#) as we gradually adjust the dials back toward a new normal.

Employees at the Met Council who are teleworking will continue to do so until at least June 2021.

Met Council management continues to monitor the state of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on our operations and workforce. We plan to continue to take our lead from the governor and federal and state public health officials to determine the best timing to ease teleworking requirements and slowly bring staff back to the office. We are working to create transition plans, but these plans will need to be flexible enough to accommodate the spread of COVID-19 in Minnesota and elsewhere, predictive modeling, and direction from the governor's office and the Minnesota Department of Health.

The decision to implement telework does not assume that working on Met Council property is not safe. It's an effort to provide sufficient social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19, as recommended by the Minnesota Department of Health.

Timeline:

- Met Council implemented flexible teleworking practices beginning March 15. The telework and alternative work schedules procedures were expanded with this initial effort. [Read the March 15 all-staff message for more information on these decisions](#).
- The Governor signed the Stay Home MN order, [Executive Order 20-20 \(PDF\)](#). To comply with this stay-at-home order, all Met Council employees who were able and authorized to telework started teleworking as of 11:59 p.m. on Friday, March 27. This stay-at-home order superseded the Met Council's implementation of flexible teleworking practices that began March 15.
- The Governor signed the Stay Safe MN order, [Executive Order 20-56 \(PDF\)](#), which replaced the stay-at-home order as it expired on May 18. This order maintained the guideline that all employees who are able to telework must continue to do so.

Review the [technology section of the employee FAQ](#) for technical support and resources.

See question on the employee FAQ regarding [data practices guidance for teleworking](#).

Contact the [IS ServiceDesk](#) for assistance or questions.

5. Can I create an alternate work schedule for my staff?

Adjusting work schedules is one way to limit interactions in the workplace and can assist with social distancing. Supervisors are encouraged to consider using staggered schedules where appropriate.

6. Are we adjusting our leave processes for people staying home sick or caring for family members sick?

(Updated 7-2-20)

If your staff are sick, they should stay home. This practice should always be followed, especially during a public health crisis.

While we encourage managers to be flexible with their staff where possible, including allowing situational instances where staff work remotely, we are also aware of operational realities where people are not able to work from home.

If employees are concerned about flex time or telework options, they should coordinate with their managers and if you need help, contact Human Resources Employee Resources Center.

In response to an executive order signed by the Governor early on in the pandemic that provided paid leave for state employees unable to work for reasons related to COVID-19, the Met Council also instituted a policy creating paid COVID-19 leave for employees directly affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. This policy was effective March 20 through June 12 for employees who must be absent from work for reasons related to COVID-19 and cannot or are not allowed to telework.

Our updated COVID-19 Leave policy is effective June 13 through December 31.

Employees will use the [new COVID-19 leave request form \(PDF\)](#) for leave needed starting June 13. (This form was updated June 9.)

Review the [COVID-19 Leave summary \(PDF\)](#) for an overview of the updated policy and the details for each of the three leave types covered.

Review the [COVID-19 Leave policy document](#) for complete information. (This document was updated June 12 with a link to the time codes guide.)

[Recording of a Q&A session for managers on the June 13 policy changes \(60 min\)](#)

[COVID-19 Leave time codes \(PDF\)](#)

Requesting leave:

1. Managers will assign employees to telework where appropriate.
2. Employee requests COVID-19 Leave with their manager.
3. The employee completes the COVID-19 Leave request form.
4. The manager submits the COVID-19 Leave request form to the [Employee Resource Center \(ERC\)](#).
5. The ERC will reach out to the employee to request documentation (documentation needed depends on type of leave requested).
6. Leave is approved for a specific time period. Employees and managers are asked to resubmit the COVID-19 Leave request form to the ERC if additional time is needed.

To obtain documentation, start with your medical provider, virtuwell, or seek testing through the [state's expanded testing network](#). Occupational Health (HR-OccHealth@metc.state.mn.us) will help determine whether you need additional documentation.

If you have any questions about the impacts of COVID-19 leave on pay, please direct those to the Employee Resource Center (EmployeeResourceCenter@metc.state.mn.us) in Human Resources. Those questions should not go to the Payroll department.

7. May a manager ask an employee if they are traveling to a region that is being affected by COVID-19 or whether they have been possibly exposed to the virus during travel?

Yes, managers may inquire about whether an employee has traveled to a COVID-19-affected region or about possible exposure to the virus during travel. However, if these inquiries are made, they must be directed to all employees known or believed to have recently traveled to these areas; such inquiries cannot be directed only to employees of certain races, ethnicities, national origins, or other protected categories.

8. May a manager require an employee who traveled from or through a COVID 19-affected region to stay home?

If an employee has traveled from or through a CDC-designated Level 3 area, the person should have been identified at their port of entry into the United States and placed into self-quarantine for 14 days since leaving the area. This means, to the extent possible, staying at home or in a comparable setting, avoidance of settings where people congregate, limiting public activities, and practicing social distancing. This also means that the traveler, in almost all cases, should not go to the workplace.

The employee may telecommute if feasible or use accrued leave per the applicable collective bargaining agreement or Met Council policies.

9. What should managers do if an employee becomes ill at work with influenza-like symptoms?

Managers may send home employees who display symptoms of contagious diseases but must be careful to send all employees home who display similar symptoms. If an employee goes home because they are displaying symptoms of a contagious disease, continue to follow normal policies and procedures for FMLA and other leave.

10. What if an employee refuses to come to work out of fear of getting sick?

Unless directed otherwise by a health care provider or the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), employees who are well should report to work or telework.

The employee must continue to follow normal policies and procedures for requesting leave and may be subject to disciplinary action for failing to show up for work or for failing to comply with normal leave policies and procedures.

Supervisors and managers should work to address the employee's concerns with the help of Human Resources as needed, including the application of current recommendations of social distancing in the workplace. If the employee requests time off they need to use accrued leave per the Met Council's normal leave policies and procedures.

Employees feeling anxious about COVID-19 should get accurate information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, MDH, and/or consider contacting Sand Creek, the Met Council's employee assistance program.

11. What if an employee suspects they may have COVID-19?

If they are seeking medical care, they should visit their primary care or urgent care clinic. Employees who think they have COVID-19 should follow the [CDC's instructions if you are sick](#) before visiting a medical clinic for care.

If they think they have COVID-19, they should not use the Well@Work clinic. The HealthPartners Well@Work clinics do not have testing equipment and will not be able to test for the disease.

For employees who have a HealthPartners medical plan, HealthPartners has published information related to COVID-19 care and testing, including what costs are covered, on their website at healthpartners.com/coronavirus. Their page will have the most up-to-date information from HealthPartners.

For members experiencing cold and cough symptoms and who think they've been exposed to COVID-19, HealthPartners created a short assessment using CDC guidelines to help determine if they should be tested. You can take the [screening assessment online at virtuwell](#). It's available 24/7 and at no cost to you. If you have additional concerns, call your primary care clinic before going in.

HealthPartners members can also use the CareLine at no cost. It is available 24/7, 365 days a year. Call 612.339.3663 or 800.551.0859.

12. What should a manager do if an employee has been confirmed to have COVID-19?

(Updated 6-13-20)

Contact Human Resources to determine appropriate steps to take with the employee and report the absence to the Employee Resource Center (EmployeeResourceCenter@metc.state.mn.us or 612.349.7558). See question #6 above for full information about the updated COVID-19 Leave policy, effective June 13.

13. What should a manager do if MDH or the employee's physician prohibits an employee from reporting to work?

(Updated 6-13-20)

If the employee is able to work, consider alternative or flexible work options under the applicable collective bargaining agreement or Met Council policies, if feasible. If an employee is unable to work, even with an alternative or flexible work option, follow the [COVID-19 Leave policy \(PDF\)](#) (updated 6-13-20). See question #6 above for full information about the updated COVID-19 Leave policy, effective June 13.

14. How should managers report COVID-19-related absences?

(Updated 4-9-20)

Managers need to report the following employee absences to the Met Council's Employee Resource Center (EmployeeResourceCenter@metc.state.mn.us):

- Employees out sick with COVID-19
- Employees in quarantine (self or doctor-directed)
- Employees out caring for a family member sick with COVID-19

Record these absences in the COVID-19 employee absence form and email the log to EmployeeResourceCenter@metc.state.mn.us. The form should be sent whenever a new absence occurs with the anticipated return date. The form should be sent again when the employee returns to work.

[Download a copy of the employee absence form](#) (updated 4-9-20; please use this new version).

Bus Operations will report these employee absences to the ERC using their leave of absence form with a clear note about the reason for their absence.

15. How will leave be covered if an employee is sick with COVID-19 or is out caring for a family member who is sick with COVID-19?

(Updated 6-13-20)

If an employee is ill with COVID-19 or is caring for a family member who is ill with COVID-19, follow the [COVID-19 Leave policy](#) and submit the [COVID-19 Leave request form \(PDF\)](#) (updated 6-13-20) to the Employee Resource Center (EmployeeResourceCenter@metc.state.mn.us) and include any available documentation. See question #6 above for full information about the updated COVID-19 Leave policy, effective June 13.

16. Should Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) paperwork be sent to the employee if they miss more than three days of work due to COVID-19?

(Updated 6-13-20)

No. Follow the [COVID-19 Leave policy](#) and submit the [COVID-19 Leave request form \(PDF\)](#) (updated 6-13-20) to the Employee Resource Center (EmployeeResourceCenter@metc.state.mn.us) and include the required documentation, as outlined in the policy. See question #6 above for full information about the updated COVID-19 Leave policy, effective June 13.

17. When should an employee be allowed to return to work after being sick with COVID-19?

Employees should follow the guidance of their medical provider but may not be required to provide medical certification of fitness for duty upon their return from leave.

If an employee presents with symptoms consistent with COVID-19, HealthPartners advises that they stay home until:

- At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications; AND
- Improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); AND
- At least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.

18. Do we need to track the time or costs we've been putting in to prepare for or respond to the impacts of COVID-19?

Yes, we have been directed to track costs (time and expenses) associated with this public health event. This is only for employees who have spent more than 10 hours working directly on our organization's preparation for and response to COVID-19.

If you have time and/or costs that need to be tracked due to COVID-19 tasks, please contact your division finance director and they will help you with next steps.

Marie Henderson, Deputy CFO – Regional Administration – 612.602.1387

Ed Petrie, Director, Finance – Metro Transit – 612.349.7624

Steve True, Senior Manager, Finance – Metro Transit – 612.349.7701

Heather Agesen-Huebner, Director, Finance & Admin – Community Development, Metropolitan Transportation Services – 651.602.1728

Ned Smith, Director, Finance – Environmental Services – 651.602.1162

For information on how to track time of an employee out on COVID-19 Leave, see question #6 above for full information about the updated COVID-19 Leave policy, effective June 13.

19. If we are hiring an intern for the summer, is there anything we should do differently this year?

As you are aware, the Met Council is currently taking appropriate action to safeguard its employees from COVID-19 and one of the actions is social distancing. To that end, intern hiring managers will be urged to interview remotely (via phone or [Webex Meetings](#)). If interviews must be done in person, hiring managers should be using rooms large enough to allow six feet between candidates and panel members.

The intern start date remains Tuesday, May 26. You will be notified if this date is delayed due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

If you already have an intern on board, please consider the following suggestions to allow for social distancing:

- Telework – typically interns are not allowed to telework. However, you may want to consider allowing your intern to telework if their tasks/activities are conducive to working remotely.
- Work schedules – intern work schedules may be adjusted by increasing (if part time) or decreasing hours (if full time), depending on the business needs of the work unit.

If you have any questions, contact Luis Martinez (Luis.Martinez@metc.state.mn.us).

20. Who can I contact at the Met Council for further guidance?

(Updated 7-2-20)

We encourage you to connect with your direct supervisor or division director if you have questions about critical services and how your work is being prioritized. You can also submit questions through [this online form](#).

For additional information or guidance, contact the following teams in Human Resources:

- General questions: An HR Business Partner (Becky Grams, Walt Joy, Nathan Smith) or any HR manager for help
- Regarding the COVID-19 Leave policy or Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA): Employee Resource Center (EmployeeResourceCenter@metc.state.mn.us)
- Regarding work accommodations: Occupational Health (HR-OccHealth@metc.state.mn.us)

The [Human Resources directory on MetNet](#) has more contact information for staff.

If you have any questions about the impacts of COVID-19 leave on pay, please direct those to the Employee Resource Center (EmployeeResourceCenter@metc.state.mn.us) in Human Resources. Those questions should not go to the Payroll department.

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If there is an issue with content on the site contact: Caroline.Griepentrog@metc.state.mn.us