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MetNet > COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

Employee FAQ: COVID-19 response

Below are answers 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 manager or supervisor. 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.

Updated 5-20-2021

COVID-19 Leave policy materials (updated policy effective January 1, 2021):

- [COVID-19 Leave policy 3.0](#)
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Situation in Minnesota

1. Have health officials identified a COVID-19 case in Minnesota?

Yes. On March 6, 2020, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) confirmed Minnesota's first presumptive case of COVID-19. [Read more about the first confirmed case from MDH.](#) Since then, more cases have been confirmed.

You can find updated information on the situation, including testing and case data, on the [Minnesota Department of Health website](#).

2. What should I know about the disease?

(Updated 1-14-21)

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. They are estimated to cause about a third of all cases of the common cold. The official name for the disease causing the current outbreak of coronavirus disease is COVID-19. COVID-19 is a viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus that has not been found in people before.

According to CDC, patients with confirmed COVID-19 have had mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of fever, cough, and shortness of breath.

Symptoms are similar to other respiratory illnesses that are circulating, such as influenza, so experiencing these symptoms alone does not necessarily mean you need to be tested for COVID-19. Considerations for who should get tested:

- People who have symptoms of COVID-19.
- People who have had close contact (within 6 feet for a total of 15 minutes or more) with someone with confirmed COVID-19.
- People who have taken part in activities that put them at higher risk for COVID-19 because they cannot socially distance as needed, such as travel, attending large social or mass gatherings, or being in crowded indoor settings.
- People who have been asked or referred to get testing by their healthcare provider, local or state health department.

Not everyone needs to be tested. If you do get tested, you should self-quarantine/isolate at home pending test results and follow the advice of your health care provider or a public health professional.

[Learn more about testing on the CDC website.](#)

COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly through close contact from person to person, including between people who are physically near each other (within about 6 feet). People who are infected but do not show symptoms can also spread the virus to others. Cases of reinfection with COVID-19 have been reported but are rare.

How easily a virus spreads from person to person can vary. The virus that causes COVID-19 appears to spread more efficiently than influenza but not as efficiently as measles, which is among the most contagious viruses known to affect

people.

3. Where can I look for the best information on COVID-19?

For the latest information on this disease, visit the [Minnesota Department of Health website](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website](#).

4. Who can I call to talk to someone about my COVID-19 health questions?

(Updated 1-14-21)

If you have questions about COVID-19, you can call the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) COVID-19 Helpline. For questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, call 651.297.1304 or 1.800.657.3504 weekdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. To contact MDH's Mental Health Crisis Line, call **CRISIS (**274747).

HealthPartners members can also use the CareLine to talk to a nurse at no cost. It is available 24/7, 365 days a year. Call 612.339.3663 or 800.551.0859. The HealthPartners online clinic, [virtuwell](#), is also available to members 24/7.

Response at the Met Council

1. How is the Met Council responding to the pandemic?

In short:

- We're working closely with other state agencies.
- We've activated our incident command center at the Met Council.

At the Met Council, we are following advice from state and federal health officials monitoring the pandemic. We have plans in place, and we are working closely with the Minnesota Department of Health to maintain an effective response and keep our staff informed.

We have activated the incident command structure at the Met Council. This ensures we have the right people in place and ready to handle the necessary planning, operations, and communications that we'll need as this region is impacted. These teams continue to assess our pandemic plans and identify our strategy and timeline for working with Met Council divisions to provide the guidance they need to address pandemic plan gaps, issues, and updates. The team is also looking ahead and developing transition plans for returning employees to work sites, how our operations and services will continue to be impacted, and what our new normal will look like.

The Met Council is plugged into ongoing pandemic planning meetings, conversations, and information sharing at the state level, via the Emergency Preparedness Response Committee, Minnesota Management and Budget, and the Minnesota Department of Health.

2. Where can I stay updated as an employee of the Met Council?

In short:

- Read the regular COVID-19 all-staff emails from Acting Regional Administrator Mary Bogie.
- Watch for updates to the story on the MetNet home page and this employee FAQ.
- Read the internal newsletters.
- Update your contact information in ESS.

Be sure to read the weekly COVID-19 staff emails, review our internal newsletters (especially The Wire and HR Connect), and keep an eye on the [MetNet home page](#) for updates on the health event so you can stay informed as the situation changes. Our [story on MetNet](#) is the best place to look for any new information from the Met Council.

We also have an emergency notification system in place to alert you if there is a critical issue for our workforce and/or certain Met Council sites. Make sure your contact information (phone number, email address) is up to date and complete in [Employee Self Service \(ESS\)](#) so you don't miss these emergency notifications. If you need help, [use these instructions \(PDF\)](#) to log in to ESS and update your contact information.

3. What does the Governor's stay-at-home order mean for my job?

(Updated 5-20-21)

In March 2020 the Governor signed an executive order to implement a stay-at-home order. To comply with this stay-at-home order, all Met Council employees who are able and authorized to telework have been doing so since Friday, March 27. For employees who cannot or are not authorized to telework or must continue to travel to work to perform certain critical jobs, supervisors and division leaders worked to adapt onsite practices and operations schedules to facilitate physical distancing and enhanced hygiene practices to keep our employees safe and minimize the spread of COVID-19.

After the executive order expired in 2021, the state updated its Stay Safe Plan to state that telework is strongly encouraged. Employees at the Met Council who are teleworking will continue to do so until at least June 2021. See [question #3 in the Attendance At Work section](#) below for more information on working remotely.

4. What if I have other questions about the Met Council and this pandemic?

If you have questions about COVID-19 or other emerging health issues and their impact on the Met Council, please contact your manager or supervisor. Please understand they may need to seek guidance before they are able to respond.

If you have questions 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 review all submissions regularly and try to address the question or concern in the FAQ or upcoming communication. If you do want a direct response, you can include your name and email address with your submission and we will connect you with the right information or staff member.

5. Is work travel allowed at this time?

(Updated 1-15-21)

We continue to follow guidance from the state and have restricted out-of-state travel for business. The only exceptions to the travel restriction are listed below and require written approval by the division general managers prior to booking

travel arrangements.

- Travel required for the enforcement of Minnesota law
- Travel required to meet the state's contractual or legal obligations
- Travel required for the protection of public health, welfare and/or safety

For other questions, connect with our [Finance department](#). To stay up to date on travel advice from public health officials, consult the [Minnesota Department of Health](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

6. Do I need to track the time or costs I'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

7. I am responsible for providing food or beverages for a Met Council-sponsored event. What do I need to know?

Avoid ordering meals that result in food sharing and instead provide individually packaged meals. When handling food and beverages, it is always important to follow good hygiene practices such as proper handwashing, avoiding touching your face, and keeping surfaces clean.

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

Staff should discontinue planning large-scale public gatherings and cancel, delay, or reschedule any planned large meetings that are discretionary for the foreseeable future as this situation continues to evolve. If you have any questions or would like assistance making that decision, consult your division director.

Additionally, meetings you can have with Met Council staff at other sites and external partners should be virtual meetings whenever possible. We have 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.)

When Met Council leadership decides the time is appropriate to transition out of physical distancing, we will inform staff we are allowing in-person meetings and events to be held and what the guidance will be for the "new normal" in our work environments.

As of March 12, 2020, 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, screen sharing, 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 is a great tool for video conferencing. Teams replaced 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.

9. Can we use the Met Council fitness centers at this time?

(Updated 1-14-21)

Following the updated guidance from Gov. Walz to dial back gym and fitness class restrictions, all Met Council fitness facilities have reopened. The Robert/Jackson Street facility is again open, following recent repairs due to water damage on the lower level of the Robert Street building.

Remember, only staff who are working onsite at a facility should be accessing the fitness facilities.

Division-specific questions

1. What is Metro Transit doing in response to COVID-19 on buses and trains?

(Updated 5-20-21)

For the latest on Metro Transit's response to COVID-19, visit [MetroTransit.org/Health](https://metrotransit.org/Health).

Questions, comments, and concerns can be directed to Customer Relations at 612-373-3333.

2. What's being done to help protect Metro Transit operators?

Like all employees, Metro Transit operators are advised to protect themselves and others by staying home if they are ill or fear they are becoming ill.

Operators and other union-represented staff who call in sick are not being charged with occurrences, which can lead to disciplinary action. Like all state employees, operators are eligible for paid sick leave if their absence is related to COVID-19.

All buses and trains, including the operator areas, are being regularly disinfected by maintenance staff. Facilities staff is regularly cleaning and disinfecting support and public facilities, including operator breakrooms. Disinfectant wipes are being distributed to operators and garage staff, and operators may choose to bring and wear their own surgical-style masks.

To promote social distancing, bus customers who can board and exit through the rear door are required to do so. On-board fare payments are not being accepted. In addition, extra service or larger buses may be deployed on routes where boarding data shows there are 10 or more passengers traveling on 40-foot buses at once (customers are being asked not to board 60-foot buses or light rail vehicles if there are 15 passengers on board).

Print and audio messages advising customers to use transit for essential travel only, to give operators and other passengers extra space and to prevent the spread of germs are being widely shared throughout the system and other communication channels.

Operators and other transit staff are encouraged to wear face coverings when they cannot maintain physical distance. With Metro Transit, rear-door boarding and barriers behind the driver's area allow operators to maintain physical distance. Metro Transit operators are not currently required to wear face coverings while operating a bus. However, Metro Transit and the ATU Local 1005 partnered to distribute fabric face masks to essential on-site employees in early April, along with care instructions and usage guidance. Questions about face coverings can be directed to a manager or supervisor.

3. I work in Environmental Services. Can I get the virus from being around wastewater?

The risks of COVID-19 need to be put in perspective similar to how we approached AIDS, H1N1, and Ebola. Recent information suggests that COVID-19 may be transmitted through the fecal-oral route. However, the fecal transmission is a risk for emergency respondents, hospital workers, prison staff, and undertakers – where it's a direct contact with bodily fluids. Once the virus is in the sewer system, the large dilution factor, the unfavorable conditions in the sewer, and our mostly automated processes greatly reduce the exposure risk.

Staff should continue to use personal protective equipment (gloves and goggles) when working with wastewater directly, not only to protect from COVID-19 but from all the other, more prevalent biological hazards that may be present.

For more, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has [information on their website](#) for solid waste and wastewater management workers.

Environmental Services has cloth masks in stock for on-site staff. The initial purchase of masks ordered enough so each employee in Environmental Services would have two masks, and masks were distributed in April to current on-site employees at each location, along with guidance on usage, cleaning, and ordering. Physical distancing to maintain six feet or greater separation between individuals is mandatory at all Environmental Services facilities. In situations where physical distancing cannot be maintained, cloth masks are required.

All Environmental Services masks and respirators are stock items that can be ordered through the division's standard checkout request procedure. If an employee's cloth face mask becomes damaged or lost, they should contact their manager to get a replacement from the warehouse. If you are having difficulties obtaining a critical item, please email or call the warehouse staff.

Safety, health, and benefits concerns

1. What can I do to keep myself, my family, and my coworkers healthy?

(Updated 5-20-21)

Health officials encourage everyone to take these precautions to help slow the spread of COVID-19 and protect yourself and others:

- Regularly wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water (for at least 20 seconds).
- Stay home if you feel sick.
- Stay at least six feet from other people who are not part of your household.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. Cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue. Throw used tissues in the trash.
- Avoid touching your face, especially eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Wear a face covering. The statewide mask mandate is no longer in effect, but mask requirements and recommendations remain for certain settings and situations. [Stay up to date on the Minnesota Department of Health's website.](#)
- Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects.

Learn more about protecting yourself and others on the [Minnesota Department of Health website.](#)

2. Should I wear a face mask to protect myself?

(Updated 5-20-21)

On May 13, 2021, Governor Walz announced an end to the statewide mask mandate, effective immediately. This change aligns our state with new guidance on face coverings from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

It is important to remember that mask requirements and recommendations remain for certain settings and situations:

- Local jurisdictions and entities may continue to have their own masking requirements.
- Minnesotans who are not fully vaccinated are strongly recommended to wear face coverings indoors.
- Minnesota's Safe Learning Plan, along with the existing face covering guidance for schools and child care settings, remain in effect.
- A federal mask requirement that applies to all forms of public transportation will remain in effect through September 13.

Learn more about the state's face covering requirements and recommendations on the [COVID-19 response website.](#)

To comply with the original mask mandate, we created a [face coverings procedure](#) for the Met Council, which went into effect July 25, 2020. At this time (May 20, 2021), the Met Council's face coverings procedure remains in effect. We will continue to keep you informed as our guidelines change.

Key things to know about our procedure:

- All Met Council employees, officers, contractors, vendors, and volunteers are required to wear face coverings per this procedure when in the workplace or public service environment.
- The procedure does not apply to staff while working from home.
- You can bring your own face covering from home to use in the workplace.
- Face coverings must be worn to cover the nose and mouth completely.
- Employees must wear face coverings outdoors when it is not possible to maintain physical distancing.
- You can temporarily remove face coverings in indoor spaces in certain situations (e.g., when presenting, eating, communicating with an individual who is deaf or hearing impaired, or when you are alone in an office or a cubicle with walls above face level).
- There are exemptions from the procedure (e.g., for staff who have medical conditions that make it unreasonable for them to wear a face covering, when wearing a face covering creates a job hazard, and in some outdoor situations).
- Employees who don't follow the procedure may be subject to disciplinary action, as specified in the procedure.
- Employees should stay home if sick or experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.

Some of the impacts to Met Council operations and services:

- Wearing a face covering is required in Metro Transit and contracted services vehicles.
- We are running a destination sign for Metro Transit buses that reads, "Face coverings required," as a reminder for the Metro Transit rule in effect since May 18, 2020.
- With the new mask mandate, the purchasing team is diligently working with the warehouse team and divisions to review inventory needs and style options.

Notes on mask wearing:

- A face covering is not a substitute for physical distancing, but it is especially important in situations when it is not possible to maintain at least a six-foot distance from other individuals who are not members of the same household.
- Wearing a mask does not mean people who are sick should be in public. Stay home if you are sick, unless you need to seek medical care.
- Everyone who can wear a mask should.
- Even if you've had COVID-19, you should still wear a mask because we do not know if people can get sick with COVID-19 again.
- Do not put masks or face coverings on children under age 2.
- Do not put masks or face coverings on anyone who has trouble breathing, is unconscious, or unable to remove the mask without help.
- People with disabilities or special health needs might not be able to wear a mask.

Tips for wearing a mask:

- Wash your hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer before putting on your mask and after taking it off – and any time you accidentally touch the front of the mask.
- Cover your nose and mouth and try to fit it snugly against the sides of your face. The covering should not be overly tight or restrictive and should feel comfortable to wear.
- Keep the mask on your face the whole time you are out. Do not put the mask around your neck or on your forehead.
- Do not touch the mask while wearing it. Use the mask ear straps or ties to take it off.
- Wash your mask after each time you wear it.
- [Check out these illustrated instructions on how to safely wear your mask \(PDF\).](#)
- [Watch these short videos from the state with COVID-19 response tips, including mask best practices.](#) Many of the videos are available in additional languages and as PDF files.

Types of face coverings:

- Types of face coverings can include a paper or disposable mask, a cloth mask, a neck gaiter, a scarf, a bandana, or a religious face covering.
- Do not buy or wear surgical or N95 masks. These medical-grade face coverings should be reserved for health care workers, who need them so they are protected when helping sick patients.
- Do not wear a mask with a valve, because it allows droplets to be released from the mask.

Buying or making masks:

- If you're making homemade masks:
 - Consider buying your materials online to avoid going to the store in person.
 - Make your masks out of two layers of tightly woven, 100% cotton fabric.
 - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website provides [simple instructions for making sewn and non-sewn face coverings](#).
- If you're buying masks, purchase them from a small business. Many businesses have expanded their product lines to include cloth face coverings.

3. What should I do if I become ill with influenza-like symptoms?

If you become ill with influenza-like symptoms, please call your primary care or urgent care clinic. 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. Employees should not go to the Well@Work on-site clinic if they suspect COVID-19. Well@Work is not currently equipped to test for COVID-19.

You should also continue to follow your manager's leave request procedures.

4. Can I use the Well@Work clinics to get tested for COVID-19? Should I visit these clinics if I think I have COVID-19?

(Updated 8-6-20)

Employees should not go to the Well@Work on-site clinics if they suspect they have COVID-19.

This includes Metro Transit employees who are looking to get tested for the virus. Tests will only be given at the Heywood Well@Work clinic for Metro Transit employees who are not experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. Drive-up testing sites can be used for employees experiencing symptoms. (See next question for information on getting tested as a Metro Transit employee.)

If you are seeking medical care, visit your primary care or urgent care clinic. Follow the [CDC's instructions if you are sick](#) before you visit a medical clinic for care if you think you have COVID-19.

For all other Well@Work visits, HealthPartners has updated the online scheduling. Starting March 25, telephone visits are the only visit types that can be scheduled online. If patients pass the telephonic appointment screening, the clinician has discretion to convert the telephone visit into an office visit. HealthPartners will communicate when online scheduling services return to normal.

5. What options do I have through my HealthPartners plan if I think I may have COVID-19?

(Updated 8-6-20)

If you are seeking medical care, visit your primary care or urgent care clinic. Follow the [CDC's instructions if you are sick](#) before you visit a medical clinic for care if you think you have COVID-19.

For employees who have a HealthPartners medical plan, HealthPartners has the most up-to-date information related to COVID-19 care and testing on their website at [HealthPartners.com/coronavirus](https://healthpartners.com/coronavirus).

If you're a HealthPartners member, HealthPartners is providing coverage with no member cost share for administration of the COVID-19 laboratory test (regardless of where the test is performed). They're also providing coverage with no member cost share related to an in-network office visit or urgent care visit associated with the test. Members can find benefit details by signing into [HealthPartners.com](https://www.healthpartners.com) or calling Member Services at the number on the back of their member ID card.

The Met Council is covering 100% of the cost for COVID-19 virus testing and treatment for our HealthPartners members – including both employees and covered dependents.

The following resources are available to you if you are concerned you may have COVID-19:

- You can get a test from HealthPartners if you are:
 - A HealthPartners member who has COVID-19 symptoms. Patients begin the process by calling their clinic for a short screening assessment. Based on symptom severity and risk factors, patients will be scheduled directly at a drive-up testing location (appointment required), referred for an in-person visit and testing at a HealthPartners respiratory center, or referred to a clinician for additional evaluation.
 - A Metro Transit employee, even if you do not have COVID-19 symptoms and even if you are not a HealthPartners member. See text immediately below for specific instructions for Metro Transit employees getting tested through HealthPartners.
- If you think you may have COVID-19, you may use the HealthPartners [virtuwell symptom checker](#), and Minnesota residents can schedule drive-up testing.
- [The most up-to-date COVID-19 testing information is available on the HealthPartners website.](#)
- The [state's COVID-19 response website](#) provides a screening tool to help you determine if you should get tested for the COVID-19 virus, as well as an interactive map to help you find testing locations near you.
- 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.

Employees should not go to the Well@Work on-site clinic if they suspect they have COVID-19.

For Metro Transit employees:

In an effort to keep our community safe and healthy and to limit the spread of COVID-19, Metro Transit employees have the opportunity to be tested for the COVID-19 virus, even if you don't have any symptoms and even if you are not covered by the Met Council's health plan.

There are two simple ways to get tested:

1. Schedule an appointment at a HealthPartners or Park Nicollet drive-up testing site, located across the metro area.
2. Schedule an appointment to get tested at the Heywood Well@Work clinic.

All testing is at no cost to you.

[Find more details here on drive-up testing locations*, preparing for your test, and interpreting the results \(PDF\).](#) *Note: Please follow the new online process below for scheduling a test at a drive-up site.

Heywood Well@Work clinic:

COVID-19 tests need to be scheduled so that regular clinic services can continue.

- Tests will only be given for employees who are not experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. Drive-up sites can be used for employees experiencing symptoms.
- Call 952.967.7468 to schedule an appointment. Tell the scheduler you are a Met Council employee and a "transit essential worker."
- Location: 560 6th Ave. N. Minneapolis, MN 55411 (inside the employee entrance to the Heywood Offices)
- Hours: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 6 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., and Tuesday and Thursday from 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Drive-up testing sites:

Drive-up sites can be used for employees experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. Please follow this new online process for scheduling a test at a drive-up site:




1. Visit healthpartners.com/lp/care/back-to-business-covid-19-testing.
2. Select "Start my screening."
3. Sign in to your HealthPartners account or continue as a guest.
4. Answer questions about your symptoms, if any.
5. Enter the 5-digit employer code: 10397.
6. Confirm details about your appointment; an email confirmation will be sent to you.

6. What resources are available through Sand Creek?

Sand Creek, the Met Council's employee assistance program, is available to all employees. They have shared the following information on their resources and availability during the COVID-19 outbreak:

- They continue to provide 24/7/365 clinical, in-the-moment counseling support to employees in need and consultation to management on a variety of organizational and client issues related to COVID-19 and all other work/performance-related issues. They are available to all levels of leadership and employees within the organization.
- They have modified their intake and assessment procedures to offer additional counseling options to include virtual and telephonic sessions. Current open cases will be offered these options moving forward.
- They will be offering informational webinars covering the challenges of the pandemic and how it relates to and impacts the professional and personal lives of employers, HR professionals and employees.
- All Sand Creek staff have been instructed on current and recommended protocol for preventing/limiting exposure and are operating in accordance as those protocols are updated when new information becomes known.

Sand Creek also shared these handouts with relevant physical and mental health information related to COVID-19:

-  [Sand Creek_Reacting to abnormal events like COVID-19.pdf](#)
-  [Sand Creek_Talking with children about COVID-19.pdf](#)
-  [Sand Creek_Germiest places in your office infographic.pdf](#)

Visit sandcreekeap.com for more resources or call 1-888-243-5744 to schedule a service. To unlock resources online, create an account in the My Life Expert login using the company code: metcouncil.

7. My spouse/family member was recently laid off due to COVID-19 and lost insurance coverage. How do I add them to my Met Council insurance plan?

(Posted 3-31-20)

If you or one of your dependents lost coverage through their employer in the last 31 days, this is considered a Federal Family Status Change that will allow you to add coverage under your Met Council plan. [Coverage is added through the benefits portal.](#)

1. If adding a dependent, you will need to add the dependent's information (name, date of birth, social security number) and request the coverage on each plan that they lost coverage on.
2. You'll then upload dependent documentation if the dependent is not currently enrolled under any other Met Council coverage (marriage certificate for spouses, birth certificates for children).
3. Lastly, you'll upload documents that show the loss of coverage. The document(s) must show who lost coverage, what coverage was lost (medical, dental, etc.), and the date it ended or will end. Don't have access to a

scanner? Take pictures of each document with your smartphone. You can either upload the pictures or email them to benefits@metc.state.mn.us along with your employee ID number.

Pages 2-4 of the [family status change instructions \(PDF\)](#) show you how to do these changes on a computer, and pages 5-13 show you what you can change, what documents are required, and the reason code to use for your situation.

You can make your family status changes on your smartphone or tablet using the BENEFITFOCUS© app. Download it for free from Google Play or the Apple App Store. Enter the company ID: MetCouncilBenefits. Log in to your benefits using the same username and password you would use on your computer. If your device has Face ID or Touch ID functionality, and the functionality is enabled for your device, you may configure the app to use this for login. The mobile app looks different between Android and iPhone versions, and the process and screens will look different from the computer version.

Remember that all enrollment requests and verification documents must be received within 31 days after the loss of other coverage. The effective date of the Met Council coverage will be the first day of the following month after the request is made and all documentation is received and approved. The cost of the new coverage will be shown on the screen when you enroll, or you can [review your union or non-represented rates on MetNet](#).

Questions? Email the Benefits team at benefits@metc.state.mn.us.

8. My flexible spending account costs have changed due to the pandemic. Can I make adjustments to my FSA elections?

(Updated 5-20-21)

Changes to your health FSA election are only allowed during Open Enrollment or with a qualified family status change. However, twice during the pandemic, health FSA election reductions were allowed for a limited time.

COVID-19 impacts on flexible spending account elections:

With the COVID-19 pandemic, many employees had their health, parking, or dependent care plans change and they perhaps were not spending as much as they anticipated when they determined their flexible spending account (FSA) contributions for 2020.

Below is an outline of the FSA types and what did and did not change in 2020 regarding election changes and rollover limits due to impacts of the pandemic.

- **Medical (health)** – Due to COVID-19, mid-year changes to the Health FSA were temporarily allowed. Outside of this time period and Open Enrollment, you can only change your contributions mid-year when you have a [qualifying family status change \(PDF\)](#). Due to COVID-19, we also increased the maximum rollover amount from 2020 to 2021 from \$500 to \$550.
 - Remember that Health FSA funds can be used for eligible health-related expenses like eyeglasses, contacts, and dental. A full list of eligible expenses is available at healthpartners.com/myfsa.
- **Parking** – No changes to our process due to COVID-19. As usual, you can update your election before the start of each quarter ([see page 13 of the family status change packet](#)). As usual, unused funds (of any amount) will all roll over into the next year's Parking FSA.
- **Dependent care (daycare)** – No changes to our process due to COVID-19. However, if your dependent daycare costs recently changed or your needs changed due to the pandemic, you may be eligible to change your Daycare FSA contribution under our existing rules ([see page 12 of the family status change packet](#)). As usual, unused funds do not roll over into the next year.

For more information or to make eligible changes, visit the benefits enrollment portal and review topics in the "Benefits" dropdown: use this [single sign-on link](#) if you are on a Met Council computer logged in with your credentials and using a Chrome or Edge browser, or visit metcouncilbenefits.hrntouch.com if on a public, personal, or shared computer. To review your FSA elections and costs, log in to the benefits enrollment portal and click the "Enroll now" button, then "Employee summary report."

Contact the Benefits team at Benefits@metc.state.mn.us if you have any questions.

9. What resources are available to employees with children?

(Updated 3-18-21)

The pandemic has caused disruption to our workforce, especially employees with school-aged children. Please review these resources and reach out to your supervisor if you need to discuss plans for this fall or school year. We are going through unprecedented times and will get through this together.

[Review the Minnesota Department of Health's website for up-to-date COVID-19 resources around schools and childcare.](#)

Families should make COVID-19 plans

All families should take time to plan for possible COVID-19 scenarios in their household. Schools may move between learning models to prioritize student safety and in-person instruction whenever possible, and as Minnesota perseveres through the COVID-19 public health crisis, we expect more people will become sick and require hospitalization. Consider family, friends, and neighbors who may be able to support you by providing alternate short-term care for your child if your child's school needs to quickly shift to hybrid or distance learning or if you become seriously ill.

By compiling critical information like your children's medical or educational needs, as well as other important information like their preferred routines and comfort items, you can help create an easier transition for you, the caregiver, and your children. The state has developed a tool to help families with this planning at [Make A Plan MN](https://mn.gov/covid19/for-minnesotans/get-help/make-a-plan.jsp) (mn.gov/covid19/for-minnesotans/get-help/make-a-plan.jsp) (available in multiple languages).

COVID-19 Leave is available to support distance learning, providing childcare

Many families with school-aged children are feeling stressed about balancing their work responsibilities and supporting their learners during distance learning, split schedules, or other changes to school routines. The Met Council has leave options that may help employees in these circumstances.

The Expanded School Leave piece of the Met Council's COVID-19 Leave policy 3.0 can be used to allow time to provide childcare for the employee's own child whose school, place of care, or childcare provider is unavailable due to COVID-19-related issues and the employee is unable to telework. This is covered at a two-thirds pay rate (after a two-week waiting period) and can be supplemented with other leave options. See the top of this page for quick access to COVID-19 Leave materials, or review question #2 below under Attendance at Work for full information about the updated COVID-19 Leave policy 3.0, effective January 1, 2021.

To request Expanded School Leave, fill out the COVID-19 Leave Policy request form, which is linked at the top of this page.

Notes on using Expanded School Leave under the COVID-19 Leave policy:

- Please note that if your child is ill with COVID-19-like symptoms and is being tested for COVID-19, that is not considered childcare leave. It falls in the “care for another” category within the policy.
- Previous leave time used under the Met Council’s COVID-19 Leave Policy from April 4 through December 31, 2020, do count toward an employee’s Emergency Sick Pay (80 hours) and Expanded School Leave (400 hours) allotment.
- Employees will receive a COVID-19 Leave Request Authorization from the Employee Resource Center after their leave request is received and approved. The authorization will have a start and end date. Employees are expected to return to work their first regular workday after the end date shown on the form.
- Expanded School Leave may not be used for days on which the school or childcare provider is closed for reasons other than COVID-19. This includes, but is not limited to, holiday breaks (including spring break), in-service days, and other reasons not related to COVID-19.
- Expanded School Leave is unavailable for employees who have opted for distance learning when in-person learning is available. Leave may be used when an employee’s child is on a school-imposed hybrid schedule on the days when the child is distance learning.

Other leave time available: Employees can use accrued annual leave/vacation/sick time to supplement COVID-19 leave (where eligible) or to take additional time off.

Finding childcare or assistance with distance learning

Many families will need care for their school-aged children during periods of hybrid and distance learning. Families that need assistance with finding care can be directed to available licensed providers by calling the Child Care Aware referral line at 1.888.291.9811 or visiting mn.gov/childcare to view a map of available providers. In addition, families may need assistance with distance learning.

Wisconsin residents working in Minnesota should be able to access Minnesota childcare resources, but there is also childcare available for essential personal in Wisconsin. You can get more information online at dcf.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/childcare.

The Met Council encourages employees to work with their school and community for additional support. Consider sharing responsibilities with other parents, tutoring or other in-home care for learners during school time, and asking your school district about any additional support they can provide. Here are some websites to help with distance learning pods or tutoring options:

- Tutors: care.com/tutors
- Learning pods: schoolchoiceweek.com/learning-pods
- Childcare and learning pods: podupnow.com
- Childcare and learning pods: thank-pod.com

Essential workers qualify for free or reduced childcare

During a hybrid or distance learning model when students are not receiving in-person instruction, districts and charter schools will provide care for school-age children 12 years old and younger who are children of critical workers on Tier 1 of the state critical worker list. This care is provided at no cost during regular school hours.

Environmental Services employees were designated Essential Tier 2 workers in the [Governor’s Executive Order 20-02 \(PDF\)](#). Employees should inquire about free or reduced fee care for children of designated essential employees: Designation of Tier 1 and 2 Workers per Governor’s Executive Order 20-02.

"Beyond the emergency workers (Tier 1) listed in the Governor’s Executive Order, there are other critical workers that are necessary for districts to consider. Care for children of educators, gas and electric utility workers, food distribution personnel, water treatment staff, and others outlined below is essential to ensuring the public continues to receive these vital services.

Districts should make every effort to provide care for school-age children of workers designated Tier 1 or Tier 2, if they are able to do so while adhering to the Minnesota Department of Health's social distancing guidelines."

Essential employee verification

If your childcare facility requires you to verify you are an essential (Tier 1 or Tier 2) or emergency worker, we have a verification letter template available on Met Council letterhead. If you need such a letter, contact your facility administrative staff. They will work with your manager/supervisor to fill in the relevant fields on the letter and sign it for you on the linked template: Daycare and School Letter Template.

Financial assistance

Families in need of financial assistance should use [Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota's Bridge to Benefits](#) screening tool to determine if they are eligible for financial supports. They are also encouraged to apply for [Child Care Assistance](#).

Food security resources

The Children's Cabinet and Food Security Workgroup created a [Food Resources for Families guide \(PDF\)](#) as an outreach resource for families with food needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The guide has food security programs and resources provided by state agencies and community partners.

Teleworking and flexible schedules

The Met Council recognizes that many of our employees need to be on-site to perform essential work. In addition, there are many employees who can perform the essential duties of their jobs while teleworking. In all cases, managers should work with their employees to ensure safety and productivity, while helping the employee fulfill their duties as a parent. When it comes to planning how the work will get done, whether on-site or through telework, one size does not fit all, so department leadership should work with their employees to discuss options. For more information on teleworking, review the resources shared in the Technology section of this FAQ.

Attendance at work

1. Should I stay home if I feel sick?

Yes. This practice should always be followed, especially during a public health crisis.

One thing workplaces can do to combat the spread of COVID-19 is encouraging employees who feel ill to stay home. Staying home when sick is a straightforward "stop the spread" tip that can actually be fairly difficult in practice, either because people are worried about sick leave or they feel otherwise compelled to show up and tough it out.

Employees should consider that staying home when sick protects not only other staff but also the larger workforce of our organization and our external stakeholders, like customers and clients. One sick employee can be a productivity impact, but an entire team of sick employees can become a much bigger problem.

2. What if I don't have enough annual or sick leave to take off work?

(Updated 4-21-21)

If you are sick, you 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 the Employee Resource Center in Human Resources.

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, and an updated policy 2.0 was in effect June 13 through December 31.

Our updated COVID-19 Leave policy 3.0 is effective January 1, 2021.

Review the [COVID-19 Leave policy 3.0 document](#) for complete information.

Use the revised [COVID-19 Leave request form \(PDF\)](#) to request leave (updated 4-21-21).

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) can help determine whether you need additional documentation.

If you have any questions about the impacts of COVID-19 leave on your 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.

3. Can I work from home? What do I need to know about working remotely?

(Updated 3-18-21)

Gov. Tim Walz has provided updated guidance regarding teleworking employees (as of April 15, 2021), removing the legal requirement that employees who can telework must and instead allowing a return to onsite work, while still encouraging remote working where possible.

For now:

- **Employees who can work from home will continue to do so at least through the end of the school year in June and, for many, through Labor Day.**
- Our Pandemic Incident Command Planning Leads are developing our plan for a phased return to the workplace for teleworking employees that may also include changes to our telework policy, allowing for a "hybrid" workplace where conducive to work areas.
- Managers will be engaging with staff and informing the Planning Leads to determine the best working arrangements for both employees and the business needs of the work area.
- Return-to-workplace plans will be coordinated with Facilities and Information Services.

From June through Labor Day:

- A phased return to worksites will begin for teleworking employees. While some teleworkers may begin returning in June, remote employees will not be required to regularly return to the office before Labor Day.

Now is a good time for teleworkers to begin the discussion with their manager about plans to return to onsite work through the transition period. Employee input will be a part of the planning process and inform the overall plan and future telework policy.

Look for more information about our planning for the phased return to onsite work in the regular all-staff COVID-19 email and here on MetNet.

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, 2020. 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.

Guidance for teleworking during the pandemic:

- All employees who are able and authorized to telework must do so.
 - Equipment needs should be coordinated through the division operations chief who will work with Information Services. There are limited resources available. (For divisions without a specific operations chief, work with your division director.)
 - Employees can access their Outlook email and OneDrive through their personal computers/laptops and internet connections.
- Formal telework agreements do not need to be submitted to Human Resources for expanded or new telework agreements during this time; however the manager and employee should agree on work tasks and work schedule.
 - Establish standard daily or weekly check-in.
 - Set expectations about each employee's workday and "hot hours" (e.g., 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.) when everyone on the team is available for phone calls, virtual meetings, etc.
 - Establish clear tasks and timeframes.
- Managers should document plans and communicate expectations to their teams to ensure employees can continue to coordinate and work together.
- Employees may telework while providing care to a dependent when schools or daycares are closed. Employees will be allowed flexibility outside typical work hours and even established "hot hours" to reach 40 hours of work (or combination of work and annual leave) within a pay period as long as they are actually conducting their job duties.

- Due to the varied nature of work performed by Met Council employees, many duties cannot be performed remotely so not every employee will have the opportunity to telework. This is one of many strategies to help slow the spread of the virus.

Notes on teleworking and technology, data practices, and more:

- As you are working from home, please be conscientious of how you're handling non-public data. [Please refer to these guidelines in the FAQ related to data practices.](#)
- Review the [technology section of this employee FAQ](#) for technical support and resources.
- See [question below](#) regarding data practices guidance for teleworking.
- Contact the [IS ServiceDesk](#) for assistance or questions.

4. I need to be on-site to perform my job. What kind of social distancing can I practice? Can we stagger schedules?

The Met Council will continue following the Minnesota Department of Health's (MDH) [community mitigation strategies](#) to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Examples of social distancing at work may include:

- Keep 6-10 feet away from each other as much as possible
- Hold necessary meetings in larger rooms
- Switch from in-person meetings to virtual meetings where possible
- Work with your supervisor to determine whether work schedules can be adjusted or schedules staggered to limit employee interaction in the workplace

This is an evolving situation, so check MetNet and the [MDH Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) website](#) often for the latest information.

We recognize there are significant groups of employees who are not able to work away from their worksite, specifically wastewater workers and transit operators. You will get some more specific guidance from your leaders in the next few days about how this affects your work and any specific changes to work schedules or situations.

- Alternative work schedules (shifts) promoting social distancing should be considered for those employees in an office environment with work that is not conducive to telework or for whom equipment is unavailable.
- Shift schedules can be utilized to promote social distancing:
 - A: 6:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
 - B: 1:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
 - C: Other shifts may be considered.
- Some shifts may be 30 minutes longer due to the lunch break.
- Managers should work with staff to identify staggered work hours to minimize group exposure.
- Employees that need to work on-site should practice social distancing (e.g., every other cube, virtual meetings, stay six feet away from others, holding meetings in larger rooms).

[Read the March 15 all-staff message for more information on these decisions.](#)

5. If I have traveled to a region that is being affected by COVID-19, should I stay home?

If you are exhibiting symptoms such as cough and respiratory issues, you should call your healthcare provider as soon as possible and provide details of your contact or travel, along with symptoms. Calling ahead will help your healthcare provider to prepare for your visit so that others will not be exposed or infected. Your healthcare provider will work with the Minnesota Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to determine if you need to be tested.

If you are not showing symptoms, you may decide to self-isolate to limit exposure to your co-workers. Speak with your manager to determine if teleworking or flexing your work schedule is an option.

6. What should I do if I sit near another employee exhibiting COVID-19-like symptoms?

You should discuss your concerns with your supervisor or someone in Human Resources. You must continue to report to work and perform your work as scheduled. Do not confront your co-worker directly and allow for your supervisor or Human Resources to determine whether to speak with your co-worker.

7. What if I am afraid to come to work for fear of getting sick?

Employees who cannot telework should follow the same precautions used to avoid contracting colds, influenza, or other infectious diseases. These precautions include washing hands, covering a cough, and staying home when sick. Employees who are concerned about possible exposure to COVID-19 should contact their manager and refer to resources published by the Minnesota Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Any request for leave must be submitted to your manager.

8. What if I need to stay home because my dependent child's day care or school or my dependent adult's care has been closed due to COVID-19?

(Updated 1-7-21)

Work with your supervisor to discuss potential telework arrangements or COVID-19 Expanded School Leave, as outlined in the Met Council's [COVID-19 Leave policy 3.0](#). See question #2 above for full information about the updated COVID-19 Leave policy 3.0, effective January 1, 2021, or see the top of this page for links to all related documents.

9. Can I be sent home from work if I show symptoms of COVID-19?

Yes. If an employee appears to have symptoms, as a safety consideration, supervisors have the authority to require an employee to leave the workplace.

10. What happens if a member of an employee's household is diagnosed with COVID-19?

(Updated 1-7-21)

The employee should notify their manager quickly upon learning of the diagnosis. The manager should immediately remove the employee from the work location and send the employee home. According to the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), the employee would need to self-quarantine for 14 days.

Work with your supervisor to discuss leave or telework arrangements as outlined in the Met Council's [COVID-19 Leave policy 3.0](#). See question #2 above for full information about the updated COVID-19 Leave policy 3.0, effective January 1, 2021, or see the top of this page for links to all related documents.

Anyone who came into contact with the Met Council employee does nothing, according to MDH protocol. They are not ordering testing for contacts of contacts. Obviously, everyone should remain attentive to their physical symptoms and

seek testing if they begin to develop symptoms related to COVID-19.

MDH assigns a case worker to any person who has a positive COVID-19 test, who then completes a contact tracing process.

11. What if I have been diagnosed with COVID-19? How will leave be covered if I am sick with COVID-19 or am caring for a family member who is sick with COVID-19?

(Updated 1-7-21)

Your absence will be covered by the Met Council's [COVID-19 Leave policy 3.0](#). See question #2 above for full information about the updated COVID-19 Leave policy 3.0, effective January 1, 2021, or see the top of this page for links to all related documents.

12. When should I return to work after being sick with COVID-19?

Employees should follow the guidance of their medical provider and communicate regularly with their manager about their return-to-work status.

If you are sick, HealthPartners advises that you 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.

13. How will I be notified if I should not come to work?

If the Met Council deems it necessary to close facilities or operations as the result of an escalating emergency, the division leader or their designee will notify affected employees.

14. Are we checking body temperatures of staff working on-site?

(Updated 9-1-20)

Many Met Council facilities are now practicing pre-entry health screening and body temperature screening to protect employees, contractors, vendors, and others from the spread of COVID-19.

All Metro Transit and Environmental Services facilities have implemented health and body temperature screening. Robert Street and Jackson Street offices began requiring this screening starting September 8.

The [Temperature Measurement Procedure](#) is available to read on the Emergency Policies & Procedures page.

Everyone who plans to enter these facilities will be required to answer four self-screening questions and have their temperature measured by trained personnel with a non-contact forehead infrared thermometer to be approved to enter the facility. This includes all employees, contractors, vendors, customers, and visitors.

If you answer "Yes" to any of the self-screening questions, you will not proceed and must leave the facility and contact your supervisor/manager.

1. Have you tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 14 calendar days?
2. Within the last 14 calendar days, have you spent at least 10 minutes within less than 6 feet of an individual who has tested positive for or been diagnosed with COVID-19, or have you been exposed to their cough or sneeze?
3. Have you had a fever of 100.0° F or greater in the past 72 hours? (If “No,” it must be without the use of fever-reducing medication.)
4. Within the last 72 hours have you had any symptoms of COVID-19 that cannot be explained by a diagnosed chronic medical condition:
 - o Chills
 - o Repeated shaking with chills
 - o New cough
 - o Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - o New muscle aches
 - o New headache
 - o New sore throat
 - o New loss of taste or smell

If your body temperature reads below 100 degrees Fahrenheit, you will be allowed to enter the facility. If it is at or above 100 degrees Fahrenheit, you can wait a few minutes and have your temperature retaken, but if the second temperature reading is at or above 100 degrees Fahrenheit, you must leave the facility and contact your supervisor/manager. You may refuse to have your body temperature read, but if you do so, you must leave the facility and contact your manager.

Be aware that some people with COVID-19 do not have a fever. Implementing temperature screenings may identify some employees who have a fever (but not necessarily COVID-19), but it is not a perfect screening device that will identify all individuals who may be contagious with the virus. Even if you pass the body temperature and health screening, you must continue to practice physical distancing and wear a face mask when on site, especially when you cannot maintain six feet of physical distance with other people present.

Most importantly, no employee should come to work if they feel ill or begin to feel ill on the way to work. This is the most effective way to keep employees safe and limit the spread of COVID-19.

15. Do we have plans in place for safely returning teleworking staff to worksites?

(Updated 3-18-21)

Met Council management continues to monitor the state of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on our operations and workforce. **Met Council teleworking employees will continue to do so at minimum until June 2021.**

See question #3 in this section above for full information on the projected timeline for returning teleworkers to worksites.

Returning teleworking staff to work sites will not happen all at once; rather it will be a phased approach to slowly increase the number of people in the workplace as conditions allow.

As we look ahead to an eventual return to work sites, and to ensure we provide a safe and healthy workplace for all our workers, the incident command team has developed and put into effect the **COVID-19 Pandemic Preparedness Plan** (plan was last updated 11-05-20).

Many people were involved in developing this plan including division planning chiefs and subject matter experts in safety, information services, human resources, and communications. Our plan follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Minnesota Department of Health guidelines and federal OSHA standards related to COVID-19 and addresses:

- Hygiene and respiratory etiquette
- Engineering and administrative controls for social distancing
- Housekeeping (cleaning, disinfecting and decontamination)
- Prompt identification and isolation of sick persons
- Communications and training that will be provided to managers and workers
- Management and supervision necessary to ensure effective implementation of the plan

All Met Council employees are responsible for implementing and complying with all aspects of this plan, and our managers and supervisors have the full support of executive leadership in enforcing the provisions of this policy. Our primary goal is to mitigate the potential for transmission of COVID-19 in our workplaces and broader communities, and that requires full cooperation among employees and management.

The purpose of this plan to provide guidance and list relevant policies and procedures that apply generally to all Met Council employees. However, we expect divisional and department managers and supervisors will need to further operationalize, tailor, and execute plans to ensure that employees in all work settings are safe, healthy, and productive. Each work area has designated an operational lead to help identify specific plans that are responsive to their unique business areas, and they will continue that work in the coming weeks. This specific guidance will follow the [State's Industry Specific Guidance](#) when relevant.

Please familiarize yourself with the Pandemic Preparedness Plan, and look for more information from the incident command team, including training on implementation.

Vaccinations

1. What resources are available to help me find a vaccine appointment?

(Posted 4-21-21)

Some of the external tools you can use to find vaccine appointments:

Sign up for the [COVID-19 Vaccine Connector](#) to get updates on vaccine opportunities and be entered into the random selection process for the state's Community Vaccination Program sites.

Contact your healthcare provider, local pharmacy, or use the [Vaccine Locator Map](#) to search for vaccine providers in your area.

If you have a HealthPartners medical plan, make sure your contact information in your account is up to date. HealthPartners is contacting eligible patients to schedule a vaccination when they have appointments available. Learn more on the [HealthPartners COVID-19 site](#).

As part of M Health Fairview's COVID-19 Vaccine Equity Efforts, they are prioritizing communities of color and indigenous communities that have experienced disproportionately high rates of COVID-19 during the pandemic. For an appointment, register through their [COVID-19 Vaccine Screener](#).

For more information about the vaccine and how to find an appointment, visit the [Minnesota Department of Health vaccine site](#).

Resources through the Met Council:

Make sure you're reading the weekly all-staff COVID-19 email to get the latest on vaccination opportunities, guidelines, and more.

Review and respond to messages from the Met Council's emergency notification system to get connected to urgent opportunities for the COVID-19 vaccine. (The system uses contact information from [Employee Self Service](#), so it's very important that your contact information there is up to date.)

The Incident Command team is currently evaluating whether there is enough demand from employees for our own onsite clinics, as so many employees have accessed the vaccine through other channels.

You do not have to wait for information from the Minnesota COVID-19 Vaccine Connector or the Met Council's emergency notification system before getting your shot. If your health care provider contacts you about making an appointment, or if you have another opportunity to get vaccinated, you can and should do that.

2. Can I use COVID-19 Leave if I have symptoms after receiving the vaccine?

(Updated 4-23-21)

Yes, employees may use COVID-19 Leave if they have a reaction to the vaccine and need to take time off, but only if they have Emergency Sick Pay (ESP) time available. Employees were given a bank of 80 hours of ESP to use from April 4, 2020, to present.

Employees with side effects from the vaccine may use a **combined maximum of three days (24 hours) of ESP** to recuperate. For example, if an employee has symptoms after the first dose and uses two eight-hour days of ESP, if they have symptoms after the second dose, they are allowed only one eight-hour day of ESP. If additional leave is necessary, employees can use accrued annual or sick leave.

When filling out section 1A of the form for vaccine-related requests, you are not required to identify your symptoms.

The Employee Resource Center (ERC) is working to respond to a high volume of COVID-19 Leave requests and FMLA requests. Human Resources has added temporary additions to the ERC staff, and we are working with our partners in Metro Transit and Environmental Services to quickly approve the use of Emergency Sick Pay for vaccine-related absences.

To use COVID-19 Leave for a vaccine-related absence, follow the correct process for your division as soon as possible:

- Environmental Services: Managers should complete this online form to request vaccine-related leave only: [COVID-19 Leave \(ESP\) Request for Vaccine Reaction](#).
- Metro Transit: Managers and supervisors are asked to send COVID-19 Leave requests for vaccine-related absences to John Cook at John.Cook@metrotransit.org.
- Regional Administration, Community Development, and Metropolitan Transportation Services: The employee should talk with their manager and complete the [COVID-19 Leave request form \(PDF\)](#) (using section 1A for vaccine-related absence), and email it to the ERC at EmployeeResourceCenter@metc.state.mn.us.

3. Can I use COVID-19 Leave to get the vaccine?

(Posted 4-21-21)

No, employees may not use COVID-19 Leave to get a vaccine. This is a similar situation to when an employee gets a flu shot, preventative test, or cancer screen. Employees are required to do this on their own time.

If an employee is contacted to get a vaccine on short notice, they should talk with their manager.

If additional leave is necessary, employees can use accrued annual or sick leave.

4. How do I indicate COVID-19 Leave on my timesheet?

(Updated 4-22-21)

The time code for COVID-19 Leave is released to the manager after the leave request form is received and approved.

Technology and Working Remotely

1. What tools are available to me for teleworking?

(Updated 6-8-20)

MetNet

Connect to [MetNet from anywhere](#). Be prepared to log in using your work username and password and verify with multi-factor authentication (MFA).

[Setting up and using multi-factor authentication](#)

Microsoft Office

You can [access Microsoft Office 365 from any web browser](#). This includes Outlook, OneDrive, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, OneNote, SharePoint, Teams, and more. Be prepared to log in using your work username and password and verify with multi-factor authentication (MFA).

- [Setting up and using multi-factor authentication](#)
- [Accessing Office 365 from a personal device](#)

Laptop with VPN

If you have a Met Council-issued laptop with VPN (Virtual Private Network) software installed, you can connect directly to the Met Council's network from your home internet. VPN is not allowed from non-Council-issued computers. When you log in, you will be prompted to log in to the VPN with your standard username and password. Once that is completed, your laptop will be connected to the Met Council's network and will behave as if you were sitting in the office.

If you are using a laptop with VPN, you can open and use Microsoft Teams directly on your laptop. Do not use Remote Desktop to connect to a computer in the office for Microsoft Teams meetings because it will not allow the audio to work properly.

- [Instructions for using CheckPoint VPN with a PC \(Windows\)](#)

- [Instructions for using CheckPoint VPN with a Mac](#)

For a laptop to work well for VPN, you must have home broadband internet. If there is no broadband internet, cellular connectivity can be included with the laptop, but this will limit the functionality of the computer for teleworking. There will be diminished or unreliable capacity for high data use applications such as video or audio in Microsoft Teams or Webex Meetings.

Citrix Applications

Citrix allows you to connect to Met Council applications using your personal computer.

- [How to access Citrix Applications](#)
- [How to install Citrix on a non-Council PC Windows computer](#)
- [How to install Citrix on a non-Council Mac computer](#)

Citrix Remote Desktop Connection

Citrix Remote Desktop allows you to make a remote connection from your personal computer at home to your computer in the office (which must be turned on for this to work). If you have not used Citrix Remote Desktop before, you must request this from the IS Service Desk.

Setting up Citrix Remote Desktop

Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Teams is the primary collaboration tool within the Office365 suite. When working remotely, it allows people to send instant messages to one or more people, and to collaborate on documents in real-time. Microsoft Teams can be accessed from any internet connected device, including a personal smartphone (once you log in with your username and password). Teams can also be used for remote meetings (see question below), or for one-to-one audio calls. [More information about 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 Stream

Stream, an application from Office 365, is a new place for Met Council staff to store videos that are for internal use only. It is an enterprise video service where staff can upload, view, and share videos securely. Recordings of classes, meetings, presentations, training sessions, or other videos that aid collaboration can be stored in Stream, and it integrates with other applications like Microsoft Teams, SharePoint, OneNote, MetNet, and Groups to make sharing and viewing easy. With Stream now live, when employees record meetings in Microsoft Teams, the recording will be saved and viewable in Stream.

You can navigate to Stream from other SharePoint applications by clicking the waffle icon in the top left of your window and selecting the Stream application in the dropdown. Visit [Enterprise Content Management's \(ECM\) Stream page](#) to learn more and access resources like an intro video, instructions, and frequently asked questions. For any questions or issues, please email ECM at ecm@metc.state.mn.us.

2. I'm working remotely now. What should I know about data practices for my work files?

Please follow this data practices guidance for Met Council employees:

- Whenever possible use your work computer.
- Be aware of your surroundings and who can see what you are doing on your work computer, including members of your household.
- If you must use your personal computer:
 - Use your work OneDrive to store documents.
 - Do not store documents on your personal computer or in personal cloud accounts.
 - Do not email documents from your work email to your personal email.
- If you must take home paper documents:
 - Do not take home originals and, if reasonably possible, use a lockable “confidential” transport bag.
 - Before taking home paper documents, fill out a log that identifies the documents removed from the office and the dates they were removed and returned to the office.
 - Unless you have your manager’s approval, do not take home paper documents that must be protected (see list below of many types of nonpublic data).
 - Do not leave paper documents unattended in your vehicle or at your home.
 - If, with your manager’s approval, you must take home documents that must be protected, store them in a location where they are not accessible to others.
- Health-related information on public employees (including whether they report having flu-like symptoms, seek testing for COVID-19, or test positive for COVID-19) is private personnel data on the employees and should be shared only with someone whose work assignment reasonably requires access to the data for Council-related business purposes or as directed by the Minnesota Department of Health.

Common types of nonpublic data:

- Personnel data on employees, including performance appraisals, payroll data (other than salary amounts; hours worked), and health information
- Applicants (names, contact information, social security numbers, birth dates, email addresses, home addresses, financial information, medical information, non-final employee discipline, etc.)
- Trade secret information
- DBE application information
- Data on procurements that are in process or were not completed
- Labor Relations data (information on negotiations with unions)
- HRA data (location of housing, all information on clients)
- Risk Management claim data
- Attorney work product and client communication
- Police investigative data
- Information on sensitive infrastructure and systems (SCADA systems, plans for wastewater treatment plants, etc.)
- “Security information” and sensitive security information (SSI) that, if known to unauthorized persons, could be used to threaten the safety and security of persons and property
- Appraisal data
- Audit data (information relating to audits that are not complete)

3. What cybersecurity precautions should I take when working from home?

(Updated 4-10-20)

Federal authorities have issued alerts about the rise of phishing email scams related to COVID-19 and other subjects. Please be extra vigilant with your email to lookout for fake messages trying to trick you into clicking links. As is the case with all emails you receive, be sure to check for red flags like these:

- Sender's email address: The domain of the email address does not match the indicated sender (e.g., not sent from a CDC email address).
- Link URL: The domain of the web address does not look like a trusted site (e.g., URL does not start with www.cdc.gov...)
- Urgency: Attackers commonly try to generate a sense of urgency or entice you to take immediate action.
- Writing: Keep an eye out for bad grammar or spelling.

- Personal info: Watch out for emails that ask for personal information.

Want to test out your skills identifying bogus phishing emails? [Take this phishing quiz from Google.](#)

If you receive an email that looks suspicious, please forward it to the Service Desk immediately and change the subject line of the email to "Suspicious Email." This will alert Service Desk staff to evaluate it and block links that are security threats. This can protect the entire Met Council from additional phishing threats. If you clicked on a link that you think is suspicious, please call the Service Desk immediately (651.602.1498). They will work with you to mitigate any possible security threats.

- [Guidance on dealing with suspicious emails](#)
- [Cybersecurity resources](#)
- [12 steps to securing home WiFi \(Word doc\)](#)
- [Home Office Security Tips for Personal Devices \(Word doc\)](#)
- [Beware of phishing emails related to COVID-19](#)
- [Microsoft article, "Protecting against coronavirus-themed phishing attacks"](#)
- Do not sync any personal accounts onto your Met Council device (e.g., Google Chrome Sync).
- Do not attach non-Council devices or peripherals to your Met Council computer (e.g., printer, flash drive, cameras, phones, Bluetooth headset).

4. What is multi-factor authentication and how do I use it?

Multi-factor authentication is a procedure requiring more than one kind of evidence to confirm a person's identity before allowing access to a secure environment. Two-step sign-in is a type of multifactor authentication the Met Council uses when you remotely access MetNet and Office 365 (e.g., Outlook). This type of sign-in procedure creates a layered defense that helps protect your account from fraudulent use.

[Setting up and using multi-factor authentication](#)

5. How do I set up a virtual meeting with Webex Meetings or Microsoft Teams?

(Updated 6-8-20)

The Met Council has two different products for creating remote (virtual) meetings with video, audio, and screen sharing: Microsoft Teams and Webex Meetings.

Because video consumes significant bandwidth, please refrain from using video in large groups unless you are using it only for the primary one or few speakers. If you have a small group (e.g., six people or fewer), and you want to use video, give it a try. If the quality of the call is bad or bad for some participants, turn off the video, at least for those having issues.

When scheduling Webex or Teams meetings, consider starting meetings at 15 or 45 minutes past the hour to avoid the surges in bandwidth that can happen on the hour or half hour when most meetings start. Scheduling your meeting outside of core business hours may also help improve quality.

Microsoft Teams and Webex Meetings are the only video conferencing applications approved for installation on Met Council devices. Zoom and other video conferencing software may not be installed on Met Council devices and may not be used on personal devices to initiate Met Council meetings; however employees may attend work-related Zoom meetings hosted by other organizations. Employees must not click to download the Zoom application on their

Met Council device. Instead, employees should click to attend the meeting through their browser if given this option from Zoom.

Microsoft Teams can be used for remote meetings with internal employees or external stakeholders. Up to 250 participants can join a Teams meeting. When using from a computer, it requires the audio functions of the computer (e.g., headset or earbuds with microphone work best). Teams can also be used with a phone app. [More info about Microsoft Teams](#). If you have questions about Microsoft Teams, you can [submit them in this online form on MetNet](#). Check out these [tips for improving audio quality with Microsoft Teams \(Word doc\)](#).

If you are using a Met Council laptop with VPN, you can open and use Microsoft Teams directly on your laptop. Do not use Remote Desktop to connect to a computer in the office for Microsoft Teams meetings because it will not allow the audio to work properly.

With Microsoft Stream now live, when employees record meetings in Microsoft Teams, the recording will be saved and viewable in Stream. (See Technology question #1 above for information on Stream.)

Microsoft Teams web-based trainings have been offered from MNIT, with more coming up in April and May (see MetNet home page announcements for dates and links). [Watch a recording of one of the April 6 trainings](#).

Webex Meetings are for use in the video-enabled office conference rooms for internal and external meetings. Webex can use computer audio functions and allows calling into a meeting with a phone without installing an app. Check out these [instructions for joining a Webex meeting](#) or watch these Webex training videos:

- [Webex Meetings Basics](#)
- [Webex Meetings Advanced](#)
- [Webex for Executive Admins](#)

Please avoid using the toll-free number for Webex Meetings. As we are all connecting with colleagues and partners over virtual meeting tools like Webex more and more during this pandemic, we are noticing a substantial increase in charges the Met Council has incurred from users joining Webex meetings by calling the toll-free (1-855) phone number. If possible, to save costs, we request that you either call the long-distance (1-415) phone number to join or join the meeting using the Webex application (on your computer or mobile device). Employees should feel free to download the Webex Meetings application on your Council-issued or personal device to make it easier to join work meetings. We understand that some employees cannot use the Webex application, as they do not have the audio devices needed to join Webex, and Information Services is doing their best to supply headsets when possible. If you are able, please refrain from calling the toll-free phone number to join Webex Meetings. Thank you!

Enhancing experiences on our collaboration tools: Vendors have responded to increased global demand. Cisco and Microsoft substantially increased infrastructure and resources for use of Webex Meetings and Microsoft Teams. Information Services is confident that adequate resources are available to allow use of additional virtual meeting features.

End users are welcome to start using additional features within Microsoft Teams and Webex Meetings, in particular video. Our primary goal is to fully employ our collaboration tools with all features the way the vendors intended.

Strategies for addressing problems when they occur:

- Close high-utilization apps while on virtual meetings.
- Regularly restart.
- Last resort, disable video.

6. Can I bring Met Council computer equipment home to telework?

(Updated 6-17-20)

Yes. With additional clarity that staff who are able to telework will continue doing so throughout the summer, staff may be wondering if they can bring some office equipment to their home offices or retrieve items from their Met Council worksite. The goal of providing access to some office equipment is to improve ergonomics and productivity.

We need to track assets so they can come back to the office with you, but we encourage you to request access to equipment if it will help make your home office a more productive space for you. Appropriate equipment requests include:

- Laptop computers and docking stations
- Monitors
- Office chairs
- Phone headsets
- Keyboards and mice
- General office supplies (notebooks, etc.) where appropriate

Note: Information Services does not recommend taking desktop computers or telephones home.

Before taking equipment home, consider whether you know how to do the installation and configuration needed to get the equipment working at home.

You may also access limited paper files and notes, assuming you are not bringing private data home. You may also want to retrieve personal items from your desk space; to limit access to work areas, facilities staff may assist you in retrieving your items. You will not be allowed to bring cleaning supplies or large office equipment home, such as filing cabinets or furniture from your desk or office.

How to request and pick up equipment

The first step is to check with your manager about whether it's appropriate for you to bring items home for teleworking. If your request is for technology equipment, work with your manager to ensure items are being tracked by having them fill out this [form to request access to equipment](#). If managers have questions about whether a request is allowable, they should contact their division operations chief.

Note: The request form is currently only available when on the Met Council's network. If working remotely, the manager will need to be using Citrix or VPN to access this form (see question below on connecting to Citrix).

Next, you should arrange for pickup. Each site is unique, so your managers can help you figure out the best process. If you are retrieving items from the Robert/Jackson street offices, follow the procedure below after your manager has approved your request:

- Work with facilities staff to arrange a pickup time and date by emailing RobertStFacilities@metc.state.mn.us and copying your supervisor. Please provide 24-hour notice if possible.
- Clarify which items you need and where to find them.
- Your items will be delivered to the dock for you to pick them up at the appointed time.
- Use the call button at the lower level (dock alleyway) entrance and speak to the security guard (Joseph or Amanda) to let them know you're picking up office items.
- Drive to the dock and pick up your items. Wear a mask.

7. Can I get IS Service Desk support for home computer equipment?

(Updated 6-10-20)

Information Services staff will make every effort to assist end users, even at home. However, IS staff do not have knowledge or purview within users' home networks and cannot guarantee any ability to use remote control tools typically used to take control of computers on Met Council networks. Many home networks block this type of interaction intentionally as a security measure to prevent intrusion.

Home Office Computer Help Group

There is a new Councilwide initiative within Microsoft Teams called Home Office Help. It allows staff from across the Met Council to connect with their colleagues to ask questions and receive help about home office setup for teleworking.

To join the Team and ask a question or help answer questions from coworkers, [follow this link](#). Reminder: Do not include any non-public information in the Home Office Help chat channel.

If you do not have Microsoft Teams installed on your computer or mobile device, [install the mobile app or desktop version from the Microsoft website](#).

[More info about the Home Office Help group](#) (will launch Microsoft Teams).

Microsoft Teams resources:

- [More information about Microsoft Teams on MetNet](#)
- [Microsoft Teams Quick Start Guide](#)

Service Desk returning to normal operating hours effective June 15. The volume of calls to the Service Desk has leveled off to pre-pandemic levels; in response, the Service Desk is returning to its traditional service schedule: 7 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday. Information Services will respond to emergency calls outside the Service Desk hours within 20 minutes. This change in hours will be effective starting Monday, June 15, and will reduce overtime costs, providing a better value to the Met Council.

8. Should I forward my desk phone to my home or cell phone?

Do not forward calls from your desk phone to your home or cell phone. Instead, change your voicemail greeting to include the phone number and/or email at which you can be reached.

Forwarding your desk phone will double the number of phone circuits used for any external call received, and the Met Council only has a limited number of circuits.

Be proactive and let your coworkers and regular contacts know that you are working remotely and how they can reach you.

If you already set up call forwarding, you can contact the Service Desk (ServiceDesk@metc.state.mn.us) to get it disabled.

9. How do I check my Met Council voicemail from home?

Check your work voicemail remotely using these steps:

1. Dial the Voice Mail Access number 651.602.1122.

2. Press # when the auto attendant answers and begins speaking.
3. Enter your mailbox number (same as your extension).
4. Enter your passcode.

You will then be able to check your voicemail messages and can navigate through the menu to update your greeting.

More information in this [guide for Met Council voicemail users](#).

10. How do I use GIS resources from home?

Read information for [using Met Council GIS tools and data from home](#).

11. What is the “technology freeze” during our COVID-19 response?

(Updated 4-9-20)

The primary focus for Information Services right now is to ensure smooth operations of existing technology and services and to support the COVID-19 response. Because of this, requests for new technology (new hardware and software) and technology changes (e.g., software upgrades, system enhancements, new projects) may need to be postponed. Decisions about which new technology or technology changes can move forward now will be made by the operations chiefs in each division in conjunction with Information Services.

12. How can I connect remotely to Citrix to fill out my timesheet?

There are several methods for connecting to Txbase and WAM from home. If you already have a connection to the Met Council's network through VPN or Citrix Remote Desktop, you should be able to use your normal method to fill out your timesheet. If not, below are other options you can use to get to Txbase or WAM using Citrix Receiver. Be aware that the interface you see through a phone or iPad may not be what you see when connecting within the Met Council's network.

Please disconnect from Citrix when you are done using it so we can all do our part to reduce demand on the system.

Use these documents for download links and instructions for accessing or installing Citrix on various devices:

- [How to access Citrix Applications](#)
- [Installing Citrix Receiver on a non-Council PC Windows computer](#)
- [Installing Citrix Receiver on a non-Council Mac computer](#)
- [Installing Citrix Receiver on an Android device](#)
- [Installing Citrix Receiver on an iOS device](#)

Employees who do not have access to log in their time in Txbase should email Tracy Martineau (Tracy.Martineau@metc.state.mn.us). Please include the following information in your email: employee ID, hours worked per day, pay code for the hours (regular, OT, vacation, etc.).

Managers who do not have access to log in and approve employees' time should email Payroll@metc.state.mn.us. The payroll team will help you complete that function.

13. How can I change my password from home?

(Updated 3-27-20)

If you already have a connection to the Met Council's network through VPN, you should be able to use your normal method to change your password by pressing the keys ctrl + alt + del, then clicking Reset Password. You will then need to restart your computer after which you will have a slightly different experience than you normally have in the office. [Instructions for resetting your password using VPN.](#)

If you are not using VPN, you can [use these instructions to reset your password via Office Online.](#) If you are using Citrix Remote Desktop, sign out of that before going to Office Online to reset your password.

It is very important when working from home to **change your password before it expires.** If you wait until it expires, it will be more complicated to get the new password working and reconnect to the Met Council's network from home. More information on password management is being developed.

[Met Council password procedure](#)

14. Can I use my home printer for Met Council business?

(Posted 3-27-20)

To mitigate the chances of a data security incident, only print Met Council documents to a personal printer if it is essential to perform your job. Printers store data that can be susceptible to hacking and documents containing non-public data must be destroyed properly.

Currently the Service Desk is not providing support to connect a personal printer to a Met Council laptop. The [Home Office Help Team](#) may be able to provide help with a personal printer connected to a non-Council computer.

15. How can I improve a slow connection to the Met Council?

(Posted 3-27-20)

The Information Services department has received reports of slow speeds for some users of Citrix and remote desktop. The IS department is evaluating ideas for trying to improve connection speeds, though there are many variables that can contribute to slowness.

One idea is for home Wi-Fi users to connect their computer directly to the router with an ethernet cable. In some cases, this can provide significantly faster speeds. [More information about Wi-Fi vs. ethernet.](#)

16. What should I do if I run low on work to do remotely?

(Posted 3-31-20)

With many employees now working remotely and some projects being put on hold or slowing down because of the COVID-19 situation, it's understandable that some of us might run low on tasks we can be working on during this time. If this happens to you, consider taking time to review some of these resources or completing the tasks mentioned below. This is also a good time to catch up on work or to step back and tackle some of the big-picture planning you've been meaning to tackle.

And be sure to check in with your manager or supervisor daily to see if there is new work you can be assigned.

Resources you can access and learn more about:

- Learn about and adopt the full functionality of [Microsoft Teams](#)
- Browse and take advantage of the web-based learning opportunities through Learn ([access via the Talent Hub](#))
- Check out the [Sand Creek website](#) for e-learning courses and self-help articles (to access these resources, create a My Life Expert account with the company code: metcouncil)
- Check out health and wellness resources on the [Fit for Life MetNet site](#)
- Clean out your Outlook inbox
- Clean up your electronic files

As a team, managers/supervisors and team members can think about these ideas:

- Have daily or weekly virtual team huddles (e.g., 15 minutes via Microsoft Teams)
- Have bi-weekly team meetings to discuss larger issues
- Update your department's or work unit's site on MetNet
- Submit ideas/plans for implementing work process changes
- Submit ideas/plans for continuous improvement

17. What can I do to improve the ergonomics of my home office setup?

(Updated 8-13-20)

Here is a quick checklist for you to review to help improve the ergonomics of your workstation. See below for detailed tips on setting up an ergonomic workstation.

1. Comfortable and sturdy chair
2. Stable work surface with enough space to complete work assignments
3. Enough lighting to prevent headaches and eye strain
4. Feet are positioned flat on the floor, shins in a vertical position, thighs parallel to the floor
5. Upper body angle to thighs is 90 degrees or greater
6. Avoid hunching
7. Use pillows or towels for lumbar support (as needed)
8. Forearms are parallel to floor
9. Use external keyboard/mouse (when available)
10. Raise monitor to at, or slightly below, eye level (if possible)
11. Keep arms relaxed
12. Take breaks (every 30 minutes)
13. Every 20 minutes, take 20 seconds to look 20 feet away
14. Rotate in intervals from sitting to standing work (if possible)

Watch: [Home Office Ergonomic Tips \(YouTube\)](#) (8 min.)

Resource: [Computer Workstation Ergonomics: Self-Assessment Checklist \(PDF\)](#), National Institutes of Health

The following information was shared with state agencies by the Minnesota Department of Administration's Risk Management division. The Risk Management division would like to acknowledge Mark Anderson, PT, CPE, of ErgoSystems for his contributions in the development of this information.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, many people who normally work in an office setting are now temporarily working from home. For many people this may mean sitting on the couch with the laptop on their laps. However, in terms of your comfort and productivity — as well as decreasing the potential for sore wrists, elbows, shoulders, neck, and back — here are basic guidelines for temporary laptop use at home.

General principles:

- Ergonomics:

- Ergonomics is all about the physical relationship between you and your office equipment, in this case your laptop. Laptop design, having the screen attached to the keyboard, means that if the keyboard is optimally positioned for the user, the screen is not. Likewise, if the screen is optimally positioned, the keyboard is not.
- Your goal is to obtain a comfortable, well-supported position that keeps your head balanced on your neck with your arms, back, and feet well supported.
- 30/30 movement guideline:
 - Move and change positions on a regular basis throughout the day. Don't lock into one position!
 - About every 30 minutes take at least a 30-second physically active micro-break. Get up, stretch, take a walk. Remember to MOVE . . . MOVE . . . MOVE!

Various workstation scenarios

When working with a laptop, follow the guidelines listed below most closely matching your situation, using items you have at home.

- Adjustable-height table/desk and adjustable-height chair
 - If both your table/desk and chair are height adjustable, first adjust the chair height to place your feet flat and your thighs parallel to the floor.
 - Adjust the table/desk height so your wrists are straight and your forearms are parallel to the floor when you place your hands on the laptop keyboard.
 - Angle the laptop monitor so you can see it with the least amount of forward head position.
- Fixed-height table/desk and adjustable-height chair
 - If your desk or table is at a fixed height, place your laptop on the desk/table.
 - If your chair height is adjustable, adjust the chair height so your wrists are straight when you place your hands on the laptop keyboard when you sit all the way back in the chair. You can place a small pillow behind your lower back if additional lumbar support is needed.
 - Once your wrists and forearms are neutral, if this caused your feet to come off the floor find a box or stool to rest your feet on, so they're not left dangling.
 - Angle the laptop monitor so you can see it with the least amount of forward head position.
- Fixed-height table/desk and fixed-height chair
 - Place the laptop on the table/desk. If your wrists are straight when you place your hands on the laptop, you are good to go!
 - If your wrists are not straight you need to adjust your seated height. Look for a different height chair or put a seat cushion on the chair if the chair is not high enough.
 - If this caused your feet to come off the floor, find a box or stool so your feet are not dangling.
 - Angle the laptop monitor so you can see it with the least amount of forward head position.
- Couch/furniture
 - Are we saying never sit on your couch or easy chair and use your laptop? No, you can certainly use your couch some of the time.
 - The same guidelines apply to obtain a comfortable, well-supported position that keeps your head balanced on your neck with your arms, back, and feet well supported.
 - Use pillows under your forearms to provide support for your arms and shoulders.
 - Some will also find it helpful to place a pillow under the laptop to ensure your wrists are straight when your hands are on the laptop keyboard. Make sure the soft fabric surface doesn't block the laptop vents because this could cause the laptop to overheat. Also, there are sofa servers or bed trays that may work to position your laptop when seated on the couch.
 - Make sure your feet and legs are well supported.
 - Just remember the 30/30 movement guideline and MOVE, MOVE, MOVE!
- Standing counter
 - Try to mix in some standing time while using your laptop.
 - Look for a countertop that allows you to stand comfortably with your elbows at about 90 degrees with your wrists straight (parallel to the floor) when using the laptop keyboard.
 - Angle the laptop monitor so you can see it with the least amount of forward head position.
 - Good shoes are important for standing. Good walking shoes will be good for standing.
 - Use a footrest so you can alternate one foot up on the footrest to provide for alternate foot placement and allow you to vary your body position. If you don't have a footrest, a box, a ream of paper, or books can be a good substitute.

Other considerations

- Spare keyboard and mouse
 - If you happen to have an extra keyboard and mouse around the house, you can use the laptop as a monitor while using a separate keyboard and mouse placed on a work surface. Simply position the laptop on a box or books to lift the screen top to eye level (or slightly lower if using bifocals) at a comfortable distance.
- Eyeglasses
 - Make sure your eyeglasses (for example, use of bifocals or trifocals) don't result in you holding your head out of neutral head and neck positions when viewing the monitor.
- Telephone
 - Use your phone's speaker setting for hands-free operation when using your laptop. Better yet, use a headset if you have one.
- Lighting
 - Make sure you have adequate light to read documents wherever you need to read from documents and use your laptop at the same time.
- Reduce glare
 - To reduce the potential for eye strain and eye fatigue, don't position your laptop directly in front of a window so you are facing into the light. You should always try to place your laptop perpendicular to a light source.

Content from the Minnesota Department of Administration ends here.

18. How can I keep my emails organized in Outlook?

(Posted 6-2-20)

As we have increased our digital and remote work, you are likely receiving more emails and electronic communications than ever. It can be hard to keep up with these, and not everyone's preferred method of communication is email. However, here are a few useful tips our Enterprise Content Management team has pulled together that can help you quickly clean up your email and be more productive and organized in Outlook.

1. **Set aside 10 minutes every day to process your email.** In this time if you cannot respond, try to quickly identify what emails will warrant greater attention and need to be addressed sooner. Attempt to divide and identify emails and save them to archive or a folder as appropriate.
2. **Treat Outlook like a staging area to read, write, act, and delete emails.** Please be aware the Council's email retention policy is to delete emails after 60 days in a user's inbox and users are required to save emails containing records to an approved repository, such as OneDrive, SharePoint, AX, or shared drives.
3. **Purge the "Deleted Items" folder regularly.** Deleting an email from your inbox does not actually get rid of the email from your Outlook account. To free up the space in Outlook, emails must be deleted in the Deleted Items folder.
4. **Know what not to keep.** Unless needed for a work-related task, regularly delete FYIs, CCs, informational notices, advertisements, listserv messages, event announcements, spam, personal correspondence, articles, or other reference material.
5. **Take the time to unsubscribe from emails you no longer want to receive,** then delete old messages. To quickly clean up unnecessary emails from your inbox, type the term "Unsubscribe" in the search box at the top of your inbox in Outlook. This will show all emails from vendors and listservs with the option to unsubscribe from their mailing list.
6. **Use the Outlook Conversation Clean Up tool** to delete redundant emails. The cleanup tool will delete emails that are contained in later responses: only the latest response covering the entire conversation or unique emails are retained. To access this, from the Home Tab, in the Delete Group, click Clean Up. You will be able to select a folder to perform the tool on a folder or a conversation. [More information on this tool from Microsoft.](#)
7. **Try to create template emails to speed up your response time** if you consistently send emails of a particular format. You can simply save the email as a draft and edit as needed from your drafts folder. [Follow these instructions for how to create email templates.](#)

Microsoft has put together a [great tutorial on best practices to manage email](#) using the tools available in Outlook. Please feel free to reach out to ECM@metc.state.mn.us with any questions, related issues, or if you would like

additional records management guidance.

19. How can I create a safe work environment at home?

(Posted 8-13-20)

Beyond making sure your workstation is ergonomic for your own health and wellness, review these tips to ensure your work environment is safe while at home:

- Make sure your workspace has adequate physical characteristics (e.g., dimensions, lighting, ventilation, entrance/exits).
- Install appropriate safety features (e.g., smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, emergency evacuation aids in case of fire).
- Remove potential safety hazards from your area that could cause injury or harm to persons or equipment (e.g., no frayed or exposed electrical equipment, torn carpeting, uneven floor surfaces, cluttered pathways, overhead obstructions).
- Please attempt to store Met Council materials and documents in a safe and secure manner in your home workspace (e.g., filing cabinets, bookcases, built-in shelves)
- Use a dedicated power outlet for computer equipment.
- Use a surge protector for computer equipment and do not plug power strips and/or extension cords into other power strips and/or extension cords (also called "daisy chaining").
- Don't let your cords and cables cause a tripping hazard. Route cords and use ties to achieve clear walkways.

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