


[EMPLOYEE  
RESOURCES](#)
[WORKPLACE  
RESOURCES](#)
[COUNCILWIDE  
SERVICES](#)
[COUNCIL  
INFO](#)
[DIVISIONS](#)
[MY  
COLLABORATION  
SITES](#)

## 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 12-9-2021*

#### COVID-19 Paid Administrative Leave Procedure materials (effective 11-13-21):

- [COVID-19 Paid Administrative Leave Procedure](#)
- [COVID-19 Paid Administrative Leave Request form \(PDF\)](#) (updated 11-19-21)

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#### Vaccination requirement:

1. [What resources are available to help me find a vaccine appointment?](#) (Updated 8-5-21)
2. [Can I use COVID-19 Leave if I have symptoms after receiving the vaccine?](#) (Updated 11-19-21)
3. [Do I need to be vaccinated to report to work onsite?](#) (Updated 9-16-21)
4. [How do I submit proof of vaccination?](#) (Updated 9-30-21)
5. [What is an acceptable form of proof of vaccination?](#) (Updated 9-30-21)
6. [Is there a deadline by which I must submit proof of vaccination?](#) (Updated 9-30-21)
7. [Will supervisors have access to employees' testing or vaccination status?](#) (Posted 9-23-21)
8. [How will the Met Council protect medical information? Who will see my information?](#) (Posted 9-23-21)
9. [If I use email to send myself a picture of my vaccination card to upload into ESS, does it become public data?](#) (Posted 9-23-21)
10. [Does this procedure apply to booster shots, too?](#) (Posted 9-23-21)
11. [I am currently teleworking 100% and vaccinated. Do I need to submit proof of vaccination?](#) (Posted 9-23-21)
12. [I cannot be vaccinated because of sincerely held religious beliefs and/or a medical condition. How do I request an accommodation?](#) (Posted 9-23-21)
13. [Will contractors be subject to this procedure?](#) (Updated 11-4-21)
14. [Will new hires have to follow this procedure?](#) (Posted 9-23-21)
15. [Who do I contact with questions about this procedure?](#) (Posted 9-23-21)
16. [What is the Met Council doing to keep employees safe?](#) (Posted 9-23-21)

#### Testing requirement:

1. [What is the weekly deadline for completing tests?](#) (Posted 9-24-21)
2. [What is the process for weekly testing?](#) (Updated 10-13-21)

3. If I don't use a Council-facilitated testing method, how do I manually submit my test results? (Posted 10-8-21)
4. Am I able to work while my test results are pending? (Posted 9-24-21)
5. Will testing be available 24/7? (Posted 9-24-21)
6. Can I get tested during work hours? (Posted 9-24-21)
7. Why isn't testing being offered at the Well@Work clinics? (Posted 9-24-21)
8. Are there testing sites in Wisconsin? (Posted 9-24-21)
9. If I get a test on my own, rather than through an approved vendor, do I have to pay for it? (Posted 9-24-21)
10. What happens if I can't get a testing appointment by the deadline? (Posted 9-24-21)
11. If I do not complete a test by the weekly deadline, can I submit proof of a completed test later? (Posted 9-24-21)
12. What happens if I do not take my test? (Posted 9-24-21)
13. Do I need to test while I am on vacation? (Posted 9-24-21)
14. Will the Met Council provide rapid testing? (Updated 9-30-21)
15. How accurate are the saliva tests? (Posted 9-24-21)
16. Does the test vendor or the Met Council store DNA information? (Posted 9-24-21)
17. I cannot be tested because of sincerely held religious beliefs and/or a medical condition. How do I request an accommodation? (Posted 9-24-21)
18. If I test positive, am I allowed to work? (Updated 9-30-21)
19. If I test positive for COVID-19, how will I be paid if I cannot (tele)work? (Updated 11-19-21)
20. I tested positive, served my required quarantine period, and need to test before I return to work. What happens if I test positive on a subsequent test? (Updated 10-26-21)
21. Can people who are already vaccinated have access to regular testing? (Posted 9-24-21)
22. I telework and am not vaccinated. Do I need to submit weekly tests? (Posted 9-24-21)

### **COVID-19 response at the Met Council:**

1. Where can I look for the best information on COVID-19?
2. How is the Met Council responding to the pandemic?
3. Where can I stay updated as an employee of the Met Council?
4. What does the Governor's stay-at-home order mean for my job? (Updated 5-20-21)
5. What if I have other questions about the Met Council and this pandemic?
6. Is work travel allowed at this time? (Updated 8-19-21)
7. 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?
8. I am responsible for providing food or beverages for a Met Council-sponsored event. What do I need to know?
9. Should we cancel non-essential meetings or switch to virtual meetings? (Updated 12-3-21)
10. Can we use the Met Council fitness centers at this time? (Updated 1-14-21)

### **Safety, health, and benefits concerns:**

1. What can I do to keep myself, my family, and my coworkers healthy? (Updated 8-5-21)
2. Should I wear a face mask to protect myself? (Updated 12-9-21)
3. What should I do if I become ill with influenza-like symptoms?
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 9-30-21)
5. What options do I have through my HealthPartners plan if I think I may have COVID-19? (Updated 8-6-20)
6. What resources are available through Sand Creek?
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)
8. My flexible spending account costs have changed due to the pandemic. Can I make adjustments to my FSA elections? (Updated 5-20-21)

### **Attendance at work:**

1. Should I stay home if I feel sick?
2. What if I don't have enough annual or sick leave to take off work? (Updated 11-19-21)
3. Can I work from home? (Updated 12-3-21)
4. I need to be onsite to perform my job. What kind of social distancing can I practice? Can we stagger schedules?
5. If I have traveled to a region that is being affected by COVID-19, should I stay home?
6. What should I do if I sit near another employee exhibiting COVID-19-like symptoms?
7. What if I am afraid to come to work for fear of getting sick?

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 11-19-21)
9. Can I be sent home from work if I show symptoms of COVID-19?
10. What happens if a member of an employee's household is diagnosed with COVID-19? (Updated 9-24-21)
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 11-19-21)
12. When should I return to work after being sick with COVID-19? (Updated 11-15-21)
13. How will I be notified if I should not come to work?
14. Are we checking body temperatures of staff working onsite? (Updated 6-24-21)
15. Do we have plans in place for safely returning teleworking staff to worksites? (Updated 9-24-21)

### Technology and working remotely:

1. What tools are available to me for teleworking? (Updated 6-8-20)
2. I'm working remotely now. What should I know about data practices for my work files?
3. What cybersecurity precautions should I take when working from home? (Updated 4-10-20)
4. What is multi-factor authentication and how do I use it?
5. How do I set up a virtual meeting with Webex Meetings or Microsoft Teams? (Updated 6-8-20)
6. Can I bring Met Council computer equipment home to telework? (Updated 6-17-20)
7. What level of technology support will be available to teleworkers? (Updated 10-20-21)
8. Should I forward my desk phone to my home or cell phone?
9. How do I check my Met Council voicemail from home?
10. How do I use GIS resources from home?
11. What is the "technology freeze" during our COVID-19 response? (Updated 4-9-20)
12. How can I connect remotely to Citrix to fill out my timesheet?
13. How can I change my password from home?
14. Can I use my home printer for Met Council business? (Posted 3-27-20)
15. How can I improve a slow connection to the Met Council? (Posted 3-27-20)
16. What should I do if I run low on work to do remotely? (Posted 3-31-20)
17. What can I do to improve the ergonomics of my home office setup? (Updated 8-13-20)
18. How can I keep my emails organized in Outlook? (Posted 6-2-20)
19. How can I create a safe work environment at home? (Posted 8-13-20)

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## Vaccination requirement

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

(Updated 8-5-21)

Our progress so far – and our path forward – relies on Minnesotans getting the vaccine. The vaccines are free, safe, and effective, and all Minnesotans age 12 and over can get one. Many sites are offering walk-in appointments.

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

COVID-19 vaccines are available on Mondays and Thursdays at both of the [Met Council's Well@Work clinics](#), as of July 2021. Appointments are required. Note: Masks are required at all times in the Well@Work clinics.

Schedule an appointment at one of the state's [Community Vaccination Program sites](#).

Sign up for the [COVID-19 Vaccine Connector](#) to directly schedule an appointment or get updates on vaccine opportunities.

Use the [Vaccine Locator Map](#) to search for vaccine providers in your area.

Schedule an appointment on the [HealthPartners COVID-19 site](#). and the [M Health Fairview COVID-19 site](#).

Go to [CDC: VaccineFinder](#) to schedule an appointment for a vaccine at a pharmacy near you.

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

To be fully vaccinated with the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines, two shots are required. If you've missed your second dose for any reason, get it as soon as possible.

Remember, it takes at least two weeks from the final vaccine dose to develop immunity. Even after you are fully vaccinated, you should continue to follow safety recommendations by public health officials and get tested if you are showing symptoms of COVID-19.

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

(Updated 11-19-21)

The Met Council's COVID-19 Leave Policy expired on Sept. 17, 2021. The COVID-19 Paid Administrative Leave Procedure that went into effect Nov. 13, 2021, does not allow for paid leave related to receiving the vaccine.

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## **3. Do I need to be vaccinated to report to work onsite?**

(Updated 9-16-21)

Yes. Starting Oct. 11, 2021, in order to report to onsite work, Met Council employees must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or they will need to get weekly COVID-19 tests and test negative. The Met Council and its operating divisions will be following state guidance that requires anyone who is currently working onsite – including any teleworkers who plan to transition back to the office in the coming weeks – must be fully vaccinated or test negative.

Read the COVID-19 Vaccine and Testing Requirement Procedure in Policy Central.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has determined that individuals are fully vaccinated if one of the following conditions is met:

- Two weeks after their second dose in a two-dose COVID-19 vaccination series approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or the World Health Organization (WHO)
- Two weeks after a single-dose COVID-19 vaccine approved by the FDA or the WHO

With vaccinations that require two shots, the waiting period between shots is 21 days for the Pfizer vaccine and 28 days for the Moderna vaccine.

If you still need to get vaccinated, review the tools in question #1 of this section to find vaccination opportunities near you.

If you are fully vaccinated, review the next question for instructions on how to submit your proof of vaccination to the Met Council.

For questions about the vaccination requirement, contact your supervisor or manager, review the frequently asked questions on this page, review the all-staff COVID-19 update emails, or submit your question with your name through the [online COVID-19 form](#).

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#### 4. How do I submit proof of vaccination?

(Updated 9-30-21)

Employees who are vaccinated must submit documentation to Human Resources to verify vaccination status. The form for submitting proof of vaccination is available in [Employee Self Service \(ESS\)](#).

How to submit proof of vaccination

1. Before you begin, save an electronic copy of your proof of vaccination where you'll be able to access it and in one of the following file types: .PDF, .GIF, .PNG, .JPEG, .JPG, .TIFF, or .BMP.
2. [Log into ESS](#) and navigate to the form: Main Menu > Self Service > Personal Information > MetC Vaccination Card.
3. Upload a copy of your proof of vaccination, fill out the additional fields regarding your vaccination, and hit "Submit."

Vaccinated employees are asked to complete this form in ESS as soon as possible. Getting an accurate count of vaccinated staff will help the pandemic Incident Command team as they obtain the testing kits for the Oct. 11 start date for staff reporting to work onsite who are not fully vaccinated.

Notes on the verification process:

- **Do not fill out the form until after you have completed your vaccine series.** Completion of the vaccine series means after the first dose for the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and after the second dose for the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines. Do not upload an image of your vaccine card after just your first dose of a two-dose series.
- **Human Resources will review your submission.** After you submit the form with the attached proof of vaccination, Human Resources will review the information. When HR has approved your submission, you'll receive a confirmation email from the system, and your status in ESS will change from Submitted to Approved.
- **Attachments will not be stored permanently.** The Met Council will delete any files you upload for this vaccination status form within seven days of verification.

If you need help submitting your proof of vaccination:

- [Review the instructions guide \(PDF\)](#).
- [Watch this 7-minute video on Stream](#) showing the steps, how to submit on a mobile device, and how to delete your image upon completion.

If you do not remember your ESS password, the system will provide a temporary password. Click the "Forgot your password?" link above the "Sign In" button to reset your password. If you are unable to correctly answer your security questions for the reset, contact the Service Desk for a manual password reset. They will need to know your employee ID.

More information about ESS is available in the [Quick Start Guide \(PDF\)](#) and on the ESS login page under Helpful Links. For questions about ESS, email [ESS.HRIS@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:ESS.HRIS@metc.state.mn.us).

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#### 5. What is an acceptable form of proof of vaccination?

(Updated 9-30-21)

The record must have your name, date of birth, date(s) you received the COVID-19 vaccine, and type of vaccine received. Acceptable proof of vaccination includes:

- Your COVID-19 vaccination record card from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (received at your vaccination appointment)
- Immunization record from the Minnesota Department of Health's Minnesota Immunization Information Connection (MIIC)

- Vaccination record from your doctor's office

Employee Self Service accepts .PDF, .GIF, .PNG, .JPEG, .JPG, .TIFF, or .BMP file types for the proof of vaccination.

If you have lost your vaccine card, review these instructions from Minnesota Department of Health for requesting a replacement vaccine card: [Lost Your Vaccine Card? \(PDF\)](#). This may take up to 21 business days to receive. You can also use the [Docket mobile app](#) or visit the [Minnesota Department of Health website](#) for help finding your immunization record.

To prevent the use of forged vaccine cards, Human Resources is reviewing every submission for authenticity and will follow up directly with employees with any questions.

If an employee does not provide truthful information about their vaccination status, proof of vaccination, proof of testing status, or proof of test results, they may be subject to discipline, up to and including discharge.

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## **6. Is there a deadline by which I must submit proof of vaccination?**

(Updated 9-30-21)

In order to be exempt from weekly testing when it begins on Oct. 11, proof of vaccination must be submitted and verified by Oct. 4. After this deadline, you may submit proof of vaccination at any time, but you may still be subject to weekly testing until your vaccination status is reviewed and verified by Human Resources.

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## **7. Will supervisors have access to employees' testing or vaccination status?**

(Posted 9-23-21)

No. Supervisors will only know if an employee is cleared to report to the workplace and will not receive the reason for the designation.

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## **8. How will the Met Council protect medical information? Who will see my information?**

(Posted 9-23-21)

The Met Council will not collect any medical information on employees, other than Human Resources reviewing proof of vaccination or test completion. Proof of vaccination will be deleted within seven (7) days of verification.

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## **9. If I use email to send myself a picture of my vaccination card to upload into ESS, does it become public data?**

(Posted 9-23-21)

Photos of vaccine cards are classified as private data. The Met Council encourages employees to delete photos from their emails and computers once they have been submitted to Human Resources (via Employee Self Service) for review.

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## 10. Does this procedure apply to booster shots, too?

(Posted 9-23-21)

Not at this time. If the U.S. Food and Drug Administration or other regulatory agency subsequently recommends that vaccinated individuals receive booster vaccine dose(s), employees may have to provide proof of receiving such booster dose(s) in order to be considered fully vaccinated.

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## 11. I am currently teleworking 100% and vaccinated. Do I need to submit proof of vaccination?

(Posted 9-23-21)

Yes, all vaccinated employees should submit proof of vaccination so they are cleared to work onsite – now or in the future, as teleworkers transition back to the office.

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## 12. I cannot be vaccinated because of sincerely held religious beliefs and/or a medical condition. How do I request an accommodation?

(Posted 9-23-21)

No request for accommodation is needed. You will be eligible for weekly COVID-19 testing, which is paid for by the Met Council.

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## 13. Will contractors be subject to this procedure?

(Updated 11-4-21)

Effective Nov. 1, the Met Council is asking existing contractors to assure employees and subcontractors are vaccinated or tested weekly when interacting with Met Council employees and/or members of the public in indoor settings where they have regular, in-person contact, or outdoor settings where they are unable to socially distance.

On Sept. 27, Met Council Procurement staff distributed a letter to contractors (PDF) requesting that they implement similar procedures related to vaccination and testing as the Met Council's procedure for employees. It is intended to align with the Met Council procedure requiring employees to either be vaccinated or tested weekly, to do our part to limit continued spread of the COVID-19 virus. We are also committed to making sure we do what we can to support and protect our employees who are working closely with contract employees.

There is also a federal mandate that employers with more than 100 employees vaccinate their employees or ensure they test negative regularly.

Procurement staff are helping answer your questions and have put together this FAQ resource for project managers to use as they respond to external inquiries (we will update the FAQs as needed):  [Contractor FAQs COVID-19 Vaccine and Testing Procedure 11-4-21.pdf](#)

Project managers and Met Council authorized representatives will play an important role in communicating this expectation to our contract and vendor partners. We encourage those of you in that role to work with your manager and folks in Procurement to answer questions and trouble-shoot. Review the FAQs in the document linked above or

email [Procurement@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:Procurement@metc.state.mn.us) with any additional questions you have, especially if you're struggling to find a solution.

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#### **14. Will new hires have to follow this procedure?**

(Posted 9-23-21)

Yes, all employees must adhere to this procedure.

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#### **15. Who do I contact with questions about this procedure?**

(Posted 9-23-21)

You can refer to the details on this page and in the regular all-staff emails, contact your supervisor, or submit your question through the [online COVID-19 form](#).

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#### **16. What is the Met Council doing to keep employees safe?**

(Posted 9-23-21)

In addition to implementing a vaccine and testing requirement, all employees currently accessing the workplace should continue to follow public health guidance, including:

- When you are sick, stay home and seek medical care.
- Wear masks while in Met Council facilities or working indoors with others, per our Face Coverings Procedure.
- Where feasible, practice physical distancing, per our Face Coverings Procedure.
- Wear personal protective equipment identified for your job or task and know how to properly wear the equipment.
- Use good hand hygiene and cough etiquette.

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Testing requirement

#### **1. What is the weekly deadline for completing tests?**

(Posted 9-24-21)

Employees who need to test each week must complete their test by 11:59 p.m. each Thursday in order to be cleared for work the following Saturday through Friday.

To prepare for the first week of the requirement, employees need to test between Oct. 1 and 11:59 p.m. Oct. 7 for clearance to work the week of Oct. 11.

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#### **2. What is the process for weekly testing?**

(Updated 10-13-21)



Employees have the following Council-facilitated options for testing that will automatically update your employee record.

- Onsite and take-home saliva tests will be available at most work sites. Specific processes for accessing a test will be communicated through your division incident command.
- You may choose to [schedule a test through HealthPartners](#) and use the code 10397. For help, refer to these [step-by-step instructions \(PDF\)](#) (updated 10-13-21).
- Some parts of the Met Council (including the Metro Transit Police Department) will also have access to onsite, rapid tests.

If you choose one of these Council-facilitated options, your testing status of completed and your results will be automatically reported to the Employee Self Service system and to you.

You may also choose to get your own test some other way. If you choose your own method, you will need to manually enter your test results in Employee Self Service (see the next question below for details on submitting your test results manually).

If you test positive, you must still inform your supervisor, as we have throughout the pandemic period.

For division-specific details:

- [Metro Transit weekly testing job aid \(PDF\)](#)
- [Environmental Services weekly testing job aid](#)

A list will be sent to every manager by 8 a.m. each Friday letting them know if their employees are approved to go onsite – based on vaccination status or testing status. Your manager will communicate any status considerations following that communication.

For more details on the requirement, read the [COVID-19 Vaccine and Testing Requirement Procedure](#) in Policy Central.

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### **3. If I don't use a Council-facilitated testing method, how do I manually submit my test results?**

(Posted 10-8-21)

If you choose your own testing method instead of a Council-facilitated method (listed above), you will need to manually enter your test results in [Employee Self Service \(ESS\)](#). Employees can submit their test and results on the [MetC Test Tracking](#) page in ESS.

For help completing this form, review the [ESS Test Tracking instructions \(PDF\)](#).

If you do not remember your ESS password, the system will provide a temporary password. Click the “Forgot your password?” link above the “Sign In” button to reset your password. If you are unable to correctly answer your security questions for the reset, contact the Service Desk for a manual password reset. They will need to know your employee ID.

More information about ESS is available in the [Quick Start Guide \(PDF\)](#) and on the ESS login page under Helpful Links. For questions about ESS, email [ESS.HRIS@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:ESS.HRIS@metc.state.mn.us).

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### **4. Am I able to work while my test results are pending?**

(Posted 9-24-21)

Yes. Only verification of test completion is needed in order to be cleared for work. Employees will be allowed to work at the workplace while their test results are pending, so long as the employee continues to follow all other site-specific precautions (including wearing a mask and screening for symptoms) as applicable.

If test results indicate a positive COVID-19 case, employees and supervisors will follow the normal procedures for quarantine, contact tracing, etc.

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### **5. Will testing be available 24/7?**

(Posted 9-24-21)

Vault at-home and onsite tests may be scheduled during the hours of Sunday through Thursday 7 a.m. – 7 p.m. and Friday and Saturday 7 a.m. – 5 p.m. HealthPartners clinic hours vary by location.

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### **6. Can I get tested during work hours?**

(Posted 9-24-21)

Testing may occur on work time provided that the employee receives advance approval from their supervisor to be excused from work. Supervisors have discretion to coordinate employees' testing schedules to avoid disruptions to service delivery and ensure adequate staffing coverage. Employees may also seek testing outside business hours with supervisor approval.

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### **7. Why isn't testing being offered at the Well@Work clinics?**

(Posted 9-24-21)

The Well@Work clinics are not designed with enough space and capacity for testing and normal use.

Employees who are seeking COVID-19 tests to meet the weekly testing requirement should not attempt to schedule appointments at the Met Council's Well@Work clinics. These clinics are not supporting weekly testing.

Employees who are asymptomatic and are not testing to meet the new testing requirement may access tests through the clinics. COVID-19 tests available through the Well@Work clinics are reserved for employees only; dependents should visit other HealthPartners locations or community testing sites.

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### **8. Are there testing sites in Wisconsin?**

(Posted 9-24-21)

The Met Council's testing vendors do not have physical sites outside of Minnesota, but employees may access a take-home test kit through their supervisor.

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### **9. If I get a test on my own, rather than through an approved vendor, do I have to pay for it?**

(Posted 9-24-21)

If you get a test from a non-approved vendor, you will be responsible for payment and billing. You will also need to provide proof of testing and results to Human Resources via ESS.

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#### **10. What happens if I can't get a testing appointment by the deadline?**

(Posted 9-24-21)

Employees are responsible for planning ahead and should work with their supervisor and notify Human Resources if there are any anticipated delays in completing their test.

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#### **11. If I do not complete a test by the weekly deadline, can I submit proof of a completed test later?**

(Posted 9-24-21)

Human Resources will accept and review test completion data at any time, but a delay in providing proof of test completion may cause a delay in being allowed to work and may result in disciplinary action.

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#### **12. What happens if I do not take my test?**

(Posted 9-24-21)

Employees who do not take their test will be placed on unpaid leave and may be subject to discipline, up to and including discharge.

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#### **13. Do I need to test while I am on vacation?**

(Posted 9-24-21)

You do not need to test while you are on vacation, but you will need to provide proof of testing completion before returning to work.

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#### **14. Will the Met Council provide rapid testing?**

(Updated 9-30-21)

Some parts of the Met Council (including the Metro Transit Police Department) will also have access to onsite, rapid tests.

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#### **15. How accurate are the saliva tests?**

(Posted 9-24-21)

99% accurate.

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**16. Does the test vendor or the Met Council store DNA information?**

(Posted 9-24-21)

No.

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**17. I cannot be tested because of sincerely held religious beliefs and/or a medical condition. How do I request an accommodation?**

(Posted 9-24-21)

Follow the normal procedure for requesting a reasonable accommodation, following [HR 2-1a Disability and Accommodation Procedure](#).

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**18. If I test positive, am I allowed to work?**

(Updated 9-30-21)

If you test positive, you must inform your supervisor, as we have throughout the pandemic period. The Met Council and its worksites will continue to follow all existing local public health and facilities guidelines regarding employees who test positive for COVID-19.

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**19. If I test positive for COVID-19, how will I be paid if I cannot (tele)work?**

(Updated 11-19-21)

Effective Nov. 13, 2021, the Met Council established a [COVID-19 Paid Administrative Leave Procedure](#) for employees who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and test positive for COVID-19. [Read more about the procedure in the Nov. 19 all-staff email.](#)

If you are not eligible for this administrative leave or cannot institute an alternative or flexible work option, you need to use personal leave or work with your supervisor to manage the situation within your current benefit offerings.

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**20. I tested positive, served my required quarantine period, and need to test before I return to work. What happens if I test positive on a subsequent test?**

(Updated 10-26-21)

Employees who recover from COVID-19 may continue to test positive after serving their required quarantine period and after their symptoms have ended. Per guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, employees who are testing weekly will not need to complete a weekly test for a period of 90 days following the initial positive test date.

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**21. Can people who are already vaccinated have access to regular testing?**

(Posted 9-24-21)

Vaccinated employees are not eligible to participate in weekly testing, but they may access testing as needed through their health care provider.

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## **22. I telework and am not vaccinated. Do I need to submit weekly tests?**

(Posted 9-24-21)

Beginning Oct. 11, you will not have to begin weekly testing until you need to report to the workplace for more than 10 minutes.

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COVID-19 response at the Met Council

## **1. 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](#).

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

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## **2. 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.

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

In short:

- Read the regular COVID-19 all-staff emails from 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.

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### 4. 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, and employees at the Met Council who are teleworking are continuing to do so. See [question #3 in the Attendance At Work section](#) below for more information on working remotely.

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### 5. 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.

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### 6. Is work travel allowed at this time?

(Updated 8-19-21)

Some business travel, to perform “necessary work functions,” is allowed under new travel guidance from the State of Minnesota in August 2021. Any employees who are requesting permission for travel, whether in state or out of state, must submit requests to the Met Council Incident Command to assess whether work is deemed “necessary.”

At this time, employees will not be allowed to attend in-person conferences that require travel. Employees are encouraged to attend virtual conferences and professional development opportunities.

For information about submitting requests for travel, contact your division representative on the Incident Command team. 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](#).

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### **7. 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

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### **8. 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.

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### **9. Should we cancel non-essential meetings or switch to virtual meetings?**

(Updated 12-3-21)

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.)

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](mailto: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](mailto:ECM@metc.state.mn.us) if you need help with Microsoft Teams.

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.

### **Public meetings will be virtual until further notice**

To allow time for appropriate planning and for the Met Council to monitor the spread of Omicron, Delta, and other COVID-19 variants, on Dec. 3, 2021, Chair Charlie Zelle extended the timeline for public meetings to be held virtually.

The Council and its committees, advisory committees, and work groups will continue to hold their meetings remotely until further notice. Those meetings will be conducted in accordance with Minnesota Statutes section 13D.021, and the public will continue to be notified of [upcoming meetings through the Met Council's website](#). To the extent practical, the Met Council will endeavor to allow the public to monitor the meetings electronically from a remote location.

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### **10. 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.

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Safety, health, and benefits concerns

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

(Updated 8-5-21)

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.
- When possible, 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. As of Aug. 4, 2021, the Met Council requires masks indoors at our facilities.
- Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects.

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

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

(Updated 12-9-21)

Due to increased transmission in the Twin Cities and the rise of the Delta variant, the Met Council announced Aug. 4, 2021, we are requiring face coverings in our facilities, regardless of vaccination status.

To support this requirement, our previous [Face Coverings Procedure](#) is once again in effect, which includes requirements to practice physical distancing. Employees who don't follow the procedure may be subject to disciplinary action, as specified in the procedure.

Masks are also still required on public transportation per the [requirement from the federal government](#), which remains in effect through March 18, 2022.

You should also continue these safety and health practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19 when onsite:

- Stay home if you're sick.
- Practice social distancing when possible.
- Participate in health screening.
- Get tested if you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or think you may have been exposed to COVID-19. Stay home if you tested positive for COVID-19.
- Wash your hands often.
- Clean your work space frequently.

This guidance is consistent with information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Minnesota Department of Health.

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

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.

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### **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 onsite clinic if they suspect COVID-19.

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

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### **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 9-30-21)

Employees who are asymptomatic can get tested for COVID-19 at the Well@Work clinics. However, employees cannot utilize the Well@Work clinics for the weekly testing requirement. Review the information in the testing requirement section above for Council-facilitated testing options to meet the weekly testing requirement.

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

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.

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

(Updated 9-2-21)

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/covid-19](https://healthpartners.com/covid-19).

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.

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




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## 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](https://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.

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## 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](mailto: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](mailto:benefits@metc.state.mn.us).

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## **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](https://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.hrintouch.com](https://metcouncilbenefits.hrintouch.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](mailto:Benefits@metc.state.mn.us) if you have any questions.

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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.

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

(Updated 11-19-21)

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

The Met Council and its worksites are continuing to follow all existing local public health and facilities guidelines regarding employees who test positive for COVID-19.

Flexibility:

- 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.

Paid leave:

- The Met Council's COVID-19 Leave Policy expired on Sept. 17, 2021.
- However, the Met Council established a COVID-19 Paid Administrative Leave Procedure to assist vaccinated employees if they cannot work for COVID-19-related reasons. The procedure is effective as of Nov. 13, 2021. See details below.
- If an employee tests positive for COVID-19, cannot telework, and is not eligible for the Paid Administrative Leave Procedure, they are expected to use their accrued paid time off, unless the Met Council verifies it was from a workplace exposure.

The COVID-19 Paid Administrative Leave Procedure can be used by employees who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 (as defined by the Met Council's [Vaccine and Testing Requirement Procedure](#)) and who either a) test positive for COVID-19 and cannot telework during their required isolation period or b) cannot telework and need to care for a child who must isolate due to a positive COVID-19 diagnosis, exposure per local public health guidelines, or school closure.

Eligible employees are entitled to a maximum of 56 hours (pro-rated for part-time).

Eligible employees who are requesting this leave should complete the [COVID-19 Paid Administrative Leave Request form \(PDF\)](#) and submit a copy of the requested documentation (proof of diagnosis, etc.).

Review the procedure in Policy Central for full details on eligibility and using the leave.

Read more about the procedure in the Nov. 19 all-staff email.

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

(Updated 12-3-21)

Some Met Council staff have been working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to reduce the number of people onsite at our facilities and minimize exposure for onsite employees – doing our part to help reduce community transmission.

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.

Guidance for teleworking during the pandemic:

- All employees who are able and authorized to telework should continue to do so through at least Jan. 31, 2022. ([Read more about this updated timeline in the Dec. 2 all-staff email.](#))
  - 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.
- 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.

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#### **4. I need to be onsite 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 who need to work onsite 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.](#)

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#### **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.

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#### **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.

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### **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.

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### **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 11-19-21)

The Met Council established a [COVID-19 Paid Administrative Leave Procedure](#) to assist vaccinated employees if they cannot work for COVID-19-related reasons, including to care for a child who must isolate due to a COVID-19 diagnosis, exposure, or school closure. The procedure is effective as of Nov. 13, 2021. [Read more about the procedure in the Nov. 19 all-staff email.](#)

If you are not eligible for this administrative leave or cannot institute an alternative or flexible work option, you need to use personal leave or work with your supervisor to manage the situation within your current benefit offerings.

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### **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.

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

(Updated 9-24-21)

The employee should notify their manager quickly upon learning of the diagnosis. Review the [Minnesota Department of Health \(MDH\) guidelines for close contacts.](#)

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. Of course, 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.

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### **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 11-19-21)

Effective Nov. 13, 2021, the Met Council established a [COVID-19 Paid Administrative Leave Procedure](#) for employees who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and who either (a) test positive for COVID-19 and who cannot telework during their required isolation period or (b) cannot telework and need to care for a child who must isolate due to a positive COVID-19 diagnosis, exposure per local public health guidelines, or school closure. [Read more about the procedure in the Nov. 19 all-staff email.](#)

If you are not eligible for this administrative leave or cannot institute an alternative or flexible work option, you need to use personal leave or work with your supervisor to manage the situation within your current benefit offerings.

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

(Updated 11-15-21)

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 with COVID-19 symptoms, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) advises that you stay home until all three of these things are true:

- You feel better; your cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms are better; **and**
- It has been 10 days since you first felt sick; **and**
- You have had no fever for at least 24 hours, without using medicine that lowers fevers.

If you tested positive for COVID-19 but do not have symptoms, MDH advises you stay home and away from others for 10 days.

Stay up to date on these recommendations by referring to the [MDH "If You Are Sick or Test Positive" webpage](#).

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## **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.

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## **14. Are we checking body temperatures of staff working onsite?**

(Updated 6-24-21)

Met Council facilities are no longer practicing pre-entry body temperature screening.

However, any employees, customers, or visitors to Met Council locations who appear to have symptoms of COVID-19 will be told to come back another day and be advised to seek medical attention.

Met Council divisions will continue to implement contact tracing protocols to help ensure that employees and staff who are at risk of contracting COVID-19 can properly isolate to prevent the spread within workplaces.

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.

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

(Updated 9-24-21)

Yes. Review the [Telework Transition FAQ page](#) for details.

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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](mailto: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](mailto:ecm@metc.state.mn.us).

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## **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)

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### 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).

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#### **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](#)

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#### **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.

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## 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](mailto: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.

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## **7. What level of technology support will be available to teleworkers?**

(Updated 10-20-21)

Information Services will support Council-owned devices used by teleworkers in their homes or other telework locations. However, IS staff may be unable to provide the same level of support because private home networks may prevent Service Desk employees from using remote control tools to troubleshoot issues. In such cases, teleworkers will need to bring equipment into the office to be serviced by IS employees. Information Services will not support home Internet service or personal devices.

Home office computer help group:

In addition to IS support, a Home Office Help group within Microsoft Teams allows employees 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. [More info about the Home Office Help group \(will launch a document in Microsoft Teams\)](#).

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### **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](mailto:ServiceDesk@metc.state.mn.us)) to get it disabled.

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### **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](#).

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### **10. How do I use GIS resources from home?**

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

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### **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.

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## 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](mailto: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](mailto:Payroll@metc.state.mn.us). The payroll team will help you complete that function.

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## 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](#)

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#### 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.

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#### 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.](#)

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#### 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

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## 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.*

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## 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](mailto:ECM@metc.state.mn.us) with any questions, related issues, or if you would like additional records management guidance.

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## 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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If there is an issue with content on the site contact: [Claire.Lukens@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:Claire.Lukens@metc.state.mn.us)