Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19), formerly 2019 Novel Coronavirus

SSA is committed to the health and safety of our employees. The following information will help to ensure that the SSA workforce has the most relevant information from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other agencies about COVID-19.

What is COVID-19?

Human coronaviruses were first identified in the mid-1960s. COVID-19 is a new strain of coronaviruses that had not been previously identified. It is the seventh coronavirus identified that can infect humans. The CDC has an ongoing investigation to learn more about COVID-19.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Symptoms of COVID-19 are mild to severe respiratory illness, and may include fever, cough, and difficulty breathing.

How is COVID-19 spread?

Person-to-person spread is believed to occur mainly through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory illnesses are spread.

It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

How can I protect myself from COVID-19?

According to the CDC, the best way to prevent infection is to avoid exposure to this virus. Everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses include:

- **Wash your hands** often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, rubbing your hands together until the hand sanitizer has dried.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Distance yourself from other people if COVID-19 is spreading your community. This is especially important for people who are at higher risk of getting sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
• Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.

**Should I use a face covering?**

See HRIC dated July 17, 2020. Beginning July 20, 2020, all SSA employees, contractors, and visitors must wear a face covering when in an SSA facility. Employees and contractors must also wear masks in outdoor spaces when physical distancing cannot be maintained. Employees, contractors, and visitors may wear their own covering, as long as it covers their nose and mouth, and it does not have a ventilation valve. Alternatively, the agency will provide 5 washable/reusable cloth face coverings to employees and contractors. The agency will also provide face coverings to visitors to our offices if they do not have their own. All SSA employees must complete the agency training on Wearing and Removing Face Coverings.

Also, the CDC recommends covering your mouth and nose with face coverings when around others, as you could spread COVID-19 even if you do not feel sick. This is especially important in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies).

Face coverings are intended to protect other people in case you are infected. The CDC provides guidance on increasing mask effectiveness, such as layering a cloth face covering over a disposable one. Do not use a face mask meant for a healthcare worker, and do not use a face covering on children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance. Also, face covers are not a substitute for social distancing, so you should continue to keep about 6 feet between yourself and others. The CDC poster below provides information on How to Safely Wear and Take Off a Cloth Face Covering.

• [How to Safely Wear and Take Off a Cloth Face Covering](#)

Employees and contractors may remove their face coverings only when eating or drinking at a social distance of at least 6 feet.

Please direct any questions or concerns about face coverings to your supervisor.

**Should I use disposable gloves when dealing with the public?**

Handwashing and/or the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer remain the best ways to protect yourself from becoming ill. Gloves are not recommended for general use. Overuse of gloves is associated with cross-contamination, lack of hand hygiene, and possible skin breakdown that together increase the risk of spreading disease.

All employees have access to the agency training on How To Properly Remove Disposable Gloves.

**What should I do if I have to handle mail, packages, or deliveries for SSA?**
Allow delivery persons to drop off items outside of buildings or offices whenever possible or kept at a distance of at least 6 feet during the delivery process. Follow all social distancing guidelines at all times during the delivery process. After handling mail and packages, wash hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds using soap and warm water. Use hand sanitizer if soap and water are unavailable. Avoid touching your face until you have cleaned your hands.

Consult with your supervisor for guidance before handling packages.

**Does SSA have requirements to prevent the spread of COVID-19 when working in or visiting SSA facilities?**

The agency requires face coverings, self-screening, and social distancing for employees, contractors, and visitors to SSA facilities. The agency is also providing hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies, enhanced cleaning for all facilities and protective barriers where needed. SSA employees, contractors, and visitors must wear a face covering when inside SSA facilities beginning July 20, 2020. Employees, contractors, and visitors may wear their own covering, as long as it is consistent with CDC guidance including covers their nose and mouth. Alternatively, the agency will provide 5 washable/reusable cloth face coverings to each employee and contractor. The agency will also provide face coverings to visitors to our offices if they do not have their own. All SSA employees must complete the agency training on Wearing and Removing Face Coverings.

In addition, all SSA employees, contractors, and visitors must conduct a health self-screening before entering SSA facilities. Managers will post the screening criteria below at all entrances to SSA facilities:

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

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

Within the last 14 days, have you:

- Been diagnosed with COVID-19
- Received instructions from a public health authority (local health authority, medical professional, etc.) to self-monitor for symptoms or self-quarantine
- Traveled outside the country or on a cruise ship
- To your knowledge, been in close physical contact (within six feet) with a person who was diagnosed with COVID-19 within 14 days of your contact with them
Prior to reporting to the worksite daily, employees, contractors, and guards must assess their health status using the checklist above. Employees who meet any of the self-screening criteria must contact their supervisor before leaving for work or entering an SSA facility. Depending on the employee’s health status, managers will advise whether he/she should report to the worksite, WAHQ, or use leave.

For visitors to SSA, managers will provide advance notice to customers with appointments regarding self-screening and face covering requirements. If a customer meets any of the screening criteria, managers will decline the appointment and work with the person to provide service via phone, online, or schedule a future in-person visit.

When visitors arrive, guards will confirm verbally that visitors performed the self-screening, do not meet any of the criteria, and are wearing a face covering. If necessary, guards will direct visitors to obtain and use a face covering provided by SSA. If a visitor is unable or unwilling to comply, the guard will not allow entry and will refer the person to call the phone number posted on the entrance signage.

NOTE: SSA will not record or maintain the results of the self-screening process and associated medical information.

Please direct any questions or concerns about these requirements to your supervisor.

What if a member of the public claims to have COVID-19 or appears ill?

Always treat members of the public with respect and courtesy. If you are assisting a member of the public in SSA workspace and they inform you that they have been exposed or diagnosed with COVID-19 (or they believe they have COVID-19) you should politely terminate the engagement and provide the individual with information about a means to finish their transaction (telephonic or online). You should then politely ask the individual to leave SSA space. You should immediately alert your supervisor of the circumstance or if you have any other COVID-19 related concerns or encounters regarding a member of the public in SSA workspaces. If you suspect a member of the public is visibly ill, notify your manager immediately. Review Policy GN 00203.010, Section C, “Interviewing people with contagious diseases” for additional measures.

There are a lot of discussions of quarantines and travel restrictions. Are additional remote work options being made available for employees who are subject to a quarantine or other travel restriction due to emergency orders from a state or municipality?

Yes, in addition to providing all flexibilities under agency policies, the agency made a Work at Home for Quarantine (WAHQ) option available to employees who cannot report to the office. Please consult your supervisor if you experience a situation that may require WAHQ.

If you become ill and unable to work during a period of quarantine, you must request personal leave (e.g., sick leave, annual leave, etc.) rather than continuing on WAHQ.
What is WAHQ?

WAHQ is a flexibility implemented under our continuity of operations (COOP) plan that authorizes managers to allow employees to work at home for temporary periods when necessary due to a quarantine. This flexibility may be used for all employees who have portable work regardless of whether they are normally eligible for telework. The justification for WAHQ should be based on a quarantine card from a medical official, CDC guidance requiring isolation due to close contact (i.e., within 6 feet for a cumulative 15 minutes or more) with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 disease (laboratory-confirmed case) or advised (probable case) by a licensed health care professional to self-quarantine; emergency room order, public health orders from a state or municipality, an employee’s written statement of dependent’s school or care facility closure, employee’s written statement with certification from a licensed healthcare professional of a medical condition with increased risk of serious illness, or other travel restrictions requiring quarantine.

Since March 2020, most employees have been working remotely. Therefore, WAHQ only comes into play when your component’s deputy commissioner determines that you must be recalled for in-office work. The WAHQ flexibility may be available to you after return from travel, if you are exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19, if you, someone you live with, or someone you are the primary caregiver for has a medical condition with increased risk for severe illness, or if your child experiences a school closure. You must have portable work, functional VPN access, and sign a telework agreement for the period of WAHQ. Please consult your supervisor for additional information.

May employees who are increased risk for COVID-19 complications (e.g., pregnant, age 65 or older, or with underlying health conditions) request to work at home under WAHQ?

Yes. Supervisors may approve WAHQ preemptively for employees who have a condition on CDC’s list of conditions with increased risk for COVID-19 complications. Please talk with your supervisor privately about your particular need.

In addition, supervisors may approve WAHQ for employees who live with or are the primary caregivers for someone who has a condition on CDC’s list of conditions with increased risk for COVID-19 complications. Please talk with your supervisor privately about your particular need.

Will the agency make additional telework available?

In an effort to protect our employees and customers from exposure to COVID-19, SSA offices suspended in-person service to the public effective March 17, 2020 until further notice. In addition, access to buildings is limited to authorized personnel only; all other employees are required to work from home full-time until further notice.

The World Health Organization has declared a Pandemic for COVID-19. The agency may order employees to work from home with or without a telework agreement when office access is
restricted. These steps do not constitute telework. In this case, employee’s homes temporarily become their duty stations under evacuation rules.

**Are there any circumstances where my manager might require me to report to the office while access is generally restricted?**

Yes, supervisors may require employees to report to offices to address non-portable workloads, renew HSPD-12 PIV credentials, or address IT equipment issues.

If you must report to the office, you must wear a face covering and practice social distancing. In doing so, you should maintain 6 feet of distance between you and other individuals; avoid gathering in groups; and cover your mouth and nose with a face covering that meets CDC requirements.

Employees should exchange work assignments using a contactless process such as placing documents on a table or desk, while maintaining 6 feet of social distancing at all times. In office visitors should be seated a 6 feet distance from each other and from employees including at an interview window (regardless of whether there is a barrier) and documents should be placed on tables or desks and not exchanged hand-to-hand to ensure social distancing of 6 feet at all times.

**Are there any circumstances where my manager might require me to work from home, even though I did not telework prior to this health emergency?**

Yes. During a pandemic health crisis (such as COVID-19), the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) regulations at 5 CFR 550.409(a) allow an agency to order its employees to evacuate their regular worksites and work from home with or without a telework agreement. This work is mandatory and the normal requirements stated in the telework agreement (e.g., locking desk drawer, surge protector, fire extinguisher, etc.) do not prevent the employee from working from home during emergency situations such as COVID-19. Supervisors may assign an evacuated employee at a safe haven (e.g., their home) to perform any work considered necessary or required to be performed during the period of evacuation without regard to his or her grade, level, or title. The employee must have the necessary knowledge and skills to perform the assigned work. Failure or refusal to perform assigned work may be a basis for terminating pay (e.g., designating an employee as Absent Without Leave/AWOL), as well as corrective or disciplinary action.

**May my supervisor require me to participate in meetings, trainings, or performance reviews via Skype video teleconferencing (VTC) or Microsoft Teams?**

See HRIC dated July 17, 2020. Yes. In July 2020, the agency enabled Skype VTC for all SSA employees to enhance the experience for employees and supervisors during activities where face-to-face interaction is beneficial, such as onboarding, mentoring, training, team meetings, performance discussions, conduct and counseling meetings. In December 2020, the agency
transitioned to Microsoft Teams. Teams is the agency’s platform for team meeting presentations, instant messaging (IM), audio and video calling, and application and file sharing.

Workstations will temporarily retain Skype for Business until all upgrades are completed. Once employees’ workstations have Teams installed, they must stop using Skype and only use Teams unless a workload requires the use of Skype.

If your supervisor decides to use Skype VTC or Microsoft Teams video for meetings, he or she will notify you. Please see the following guidelines for using Skype VTC.

- **Guidelines for Skype**

These guidelines also apply to Microsoft Teams. Questions regarding Skype VTC or Microsoft Teams should be directed to your supervisor.

**What if there are travel restrictions prohibiting movement in my community that might prevent me from getting to the office?**

Federal employees may pass through travel restrictions to perform official business by presenting their HSPD-12 PIV credentials and stating the purpose of their business (e.g., the reason they need to go to the office). If local law enforcement refuses passage, return home and alert management.

**Is there special timekeeping related to COVID-19?**

Yes. If managers grant employees WSL, employees must enter the correct webTA pay code on the timesheet—061 – Administrative Leave Weather & Safety – Used, and add pay period remarks as “XX/XX/XX Weather and Safety Leave related to COVID-19.” Pay period remarks are located in the accordion drop down menu at the bottom of the timesheet in webTA.

Additionally, if employees use their personal leave (e.g. sick leave, annual leave, etc.) due to COVID-19, a remark must be added to the pay period remarks on the timesheets annotating the reason as “XX/XX/XX Annual/Sick Leave related to COVID-19.” Pay period remarks are located in the accordion drop down menu at the bottom of the timesheet in webTA.

Managers will ensure that the pay period remarks are included and accurate before certifying the timesheet.

**What should I do if I am working from home and my HSPD-12 credential is about to expire?**

Our current agency-wide protocol is to notify employees of their pending HSPD-12 credential expiration 12 weeks in advance. This protocol typically provides employees adequate time to report to their credentialing location to receive the new credential before the credential expires.
If you are notified about the pending expiration of your HSPD-12 credential or that your updated HSPD-12 credential is available for pick up, you should consult your supervisor before reporting to the issuing center (e.g., regional office, field office, etc.).

**What should I do if I am working from home and I lose electricity, VPN, or internet connectivity?**

If you lose electricity, VPN, or internet connection while WAHQ, you should immediately notify your supervisor via phone or text, and take necessary steps to re-connect. This may include restarting your laptop, calling local IT support staff, the SSA Technology Assistance Center (410-965-6171), or the National Network Service Center (877-697-4889). If it is determined that the connection issue is with your internet service provider, you must contact the provider for remedy. You should update your supervisor of your attempts to connect to electricity, VPN, or internet. If you are unable to reconnect, contact your supervisor for further instruction.

**What actions should I take to ensure my laptop receives system updates while I am working from home?**

To ensure your SSA computer receives critical software updates, you should ensure your device remains powered on at the end of your work day. You should ctrl-alt-delete to ‘sign-out’ and remove your SSA PIV card from the computer after sign off is completed. Do not shut down or turn off your laptop or desktop computer. If updates do not, or are not, installed timely through the overnight software update process, they will be installed during business hours and may require you to restart your laptop or computer. See Remote Work 101 for further information.

You should check Software Center once per week and run all Required Applications and all Required Software Updates shown for your device to ensure updates are installed timely.

Available applications should only be installed if required by your job duties. See the user guide below for step-by-step instructions. As stated in the user guide, **DO NOT** click on the Operating Systems Tab in Software Center.

Software Center User Guide (Extended Telework WAHQ)

**Is it safe to travel to countries where COVID-19 cases have occurred?**

No. On March 20, 2020, the State Department issued a Global Level 4 Health Advisory, advising all U.S. citizens to avoid all international travel. See [https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/ea/travel-advisory-alert-global-level-4-health-advisory-issue.html](https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/ea/travel-advisory-alert-global-level-4-health-advisory-issue.html). On May 26, 2020, the President added Brazil to the list of travel-restricted countries currently including Iran, China, and most European countries, which have all been highly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. If you are returning from any international travel (including cruises), you **must remain home** after travel and consult your supervisor before returning to the office. In most cases, you may need to remain home for 14 days after travel for a period of self-quarantine. You may need to take personal leave. WAHQ may be available to you for this period.
What if I recently traveled internationally or plan to travel?

The United States government has taken steps to protect the American public from COVID-19 by implementing screening and monitoring of all persons entering the United States from areas of potential illness. Employees are all now well aware that COVID-19 may disrupt international and domestic travel and result in delays including returning home to the United States. Employees should plan travel accordingly and be prepared to take additional personal leave to cover quarantine periods and other delays. Employees returning from any international travel (including cruises), must remain home for 14 days after return to the United States. WAHQ will be available to employees during this 14-day period. Supervisors may work with employees before they travel or upon their return to enable telework for the quarantine period. Employees with portable work but who are not set-up to work the full 14-day period, or who perform critical non-portable work in the office and are unable to WAHQ, will remain on personal leave until they are able to WAHQ or return to the office.

When considering travel, employees should adhere strictly to CDC guidelines before, during, and after travel, including the following precautions: carefully assessing travel risk prior to travel; wearing a mask during all portions of a trip; maintaining physical distance from non-household members; maintaining good hand hygiene by regularly washing hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available; and planning to quarantine before returning to the workplace. The CDC has extensive guidelines for both domestic and international travel, and federal employees should consult these resources carefully before deciding to travel:

- https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html/

Should I report to my supervisor if I am subject to a quarantine rule after returning from domestic locations (e.g., subject to a 14-day quarantine in New York after visiting Florida)?

Yes. In some cases, you may need to remain home for 14 days after travel for a period of self-quarantine. WAHQ may be available to you for this period. Please consult with your supervisor before returning to the office.

Is the agency restricting official travel for business?

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has advised that Executive Agencies shall begin to reduce non-essential travel as appropriate. At this time, we should only conduct mission critical travel in any area where the Federal, State, or local government has declared a State of
Emergency. Employees should consult their managers about any official travel for business that is pending and refer to the Division of Travel Services website for additional information.

**What should I do if my state or municipality issues an emergency declaration?**

A number of states have declared a state of emergency to implement various orders throughout the pandemic. You should refer to state government websites for information on guidance applicable to a state of emergency in your local area.

In cases where travel restrictions or other measures are *recommended* (e.g., remaining at home, teleworking, etc.), you should consult your supervisor. The agency will make determinations about how to operate in such situations.

In cases where travel restrictions or other measures are *required* (e.g., a quarantine or travel lockdown of a specific area), you should follow your state’s or municipalities’ direction and consult your supervisor. WAHQ may be an option available in such situations.

**What do I do if a member of my family or a close-contact of mine is diagnosed with or ordered by a licensed healthcare professional to self-quarantine due to suspected COVID-19?**

If a family member, someone else who lives in your household, or a close-contact (defined as within six feet for a cumulative of 15 minutes or longer of an individual who is exhibiting respiratory issues (e.g., coughing or sneezing) or who is diagnosed with or ordered by a licensed healthcare professional to self-quarantine due to suspected COVID-19), *please remain home* and consult your supervisor before returning to the office. In many cases, you may need to remain home for 14 days of self-quarantine. WAHQ may be an option available to you for this period.

**Will my manager notify me if someone in the office has been diagnosed with COVID-19?**

The agency follows CDC contact tracing guidelines to investigate any potential exposures and works with local health departments as appropriate. The Medical Office works with managers on all COVID-19 cases to determine who may have been in close contact with a potentially infectious individual. Managers notify all potentially exposed individuals as quickly as possible, and requires them to stay out of the office for the recommended 14-day quarantine period. To protect privacy, we limit notification to those individuals identified as close contacts.

**What do I do if the school/care facility that my children or dependents (e.g., elders or dependent adults) attend is closed due to COVID-19?**

Because access to buildings has been restricted to authorized personnel, in most cases, employees do not need to present evidence of a school/care facility closure in order to work at home. The following information would only apply if a building were open to all employees.
If your dependent is diagnosed with COVID-19 or symptomatic, you should not return to the workplace. Please consult your supervisor before returning to the office.

If your dependent has not been diagnosed with COVID-19 and is asymptomatic, you have the option to WAHQ if you have portable work, take personal leave (e.g., annual leave, sick leave, credit hours, etc.), or return to work if your office is open. Due to the special circumstances surrounding COVID-19, the agency is making a WAHQ option available to parents whose children have experienced a school closure. Employees must have portable work and functional VPN access. Managers will work with you to setup WAHQ as quickly as possible. Circumstances may arise where managers may direct you to report to work on certain days to take a hearing or other non-portable workload. You would remain on personal leave until WAHQ is in place. If you do not have portable work, you may take personal leave or report to work.

If you are spending time caring for a dependent child, time spent providing care must be personal leave (e.g., sick leave, annual leave, credit hours, etc.), LWOP (if your supervisor approves based on operational needs), or flex-out. You must notify your supervisor during your WAHQ period and request approval of leave when appropriate. WAHQ is not a substitute for normal leave to care for family members. The agency is making this option available in this circumstance only since schools may be closed, back-up care options may be limited, and the presence of a parent may be needed at home even if children do not need continuous care.

**What options are available if I need to take leave in one of the COVID-19 scenarios above and do not have a leave balance?**

If employees do not have a leave balance, supervisors may approve advanced leave (i.e., sick or annual), credit hours or comp time available, or leave without pay in accordance with agency policies or guidance. Employees may apply for the Voluntary Leave Transfer Program (VLTP) in accordance with [Personnel Policy Manual Chapter S630_11](https://example.com). At this time, OPM has not established an Emergency Leave Transfer Program for COVID-19 (see [Personnel Policy Manual S630_13](https://example.com)).

**When will the additional 80 hours of emergency paid sick leave (EPSL) in the COVID-19 relief legislation be provided to employees?**

**Please note:** EPSL expired December 31, 2020. Absent additional legislation, EPSL is not an option beyond that date. We will update the questions below if an extension is enacted by law.

On July 11, 2020, our payroll provider implemented EPSL codes in our payroll and timekeeping system. Effective pay period 2020-15 (July 5-July 18), our webTA system has the following EPSL pay codes for employees to accurately record use of EPSL.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pay Code</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CV1</td>
<td>I am subject to Federal, State, or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I have been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine related to COVID-19

I am experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and I am seeking a medical diagnosis

2/3 Pay for qualifying reasons 4 through 6, up to $200 daily and $2,000 total

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pay Code</th>
<th>Reason</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CV4</td>
<td>I am caring for an individual subject to an order described in the reason for CV1 or self-quarantine as described in the reason for CV2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CV5</td>
<td>I am caring for my child whose school or place of care is closed (or child care provider is unavailable) due to COVID-19 related reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CV6</td>
<td>I am experiencing any other substantially-similar condition specified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <strong>NOT IN USE</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This new leave category is effective April 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020. The leave from this legislation will be available for future needs or may be applied retroactively. At this time, timesheet amendments must be made to retroactively apply the accurate EPSL codes to employees who used personal leave or WSL in lieu of EPSL. Please contact your supervisor if you have questions.

It is important to note that the Social Security Administration and its employees are not covered by First Coronavirus Response Act flexibilities that the Department of Labor recently issued. Those flexibilities are limited to a small number of federal employees, who primarily work in Department of Labor (DOL). SSA employees are only eligible to the 80 hours as mentioned above.

**How will employees be compensated when using the additional 80 hours of EPSL?**

The sick leave category established in the Families First Coronavirus Relief Act (FFCRA) is a new type of sick leave, separate from regular sick leave. Employees will not receive the equivalent of their normal hourly rate of pay. For “self-care,” the legislation capped compensation at $511 daily and $5,110 total. This means that employees who earn above $63.88/hour (e.g., a GS-14 step 4 in the Baltimore-Washington DC locality pay area) will receive a reduced rate of pay when using this benefit. Additionally, dependent care is capped at 2/3 of an employee’s regular rate of pay and no more than $200 daily and $2,000 total. This means that all employees using the dependent care benefit will have a reduction in pay and for many employees who hit the $200 daily cap (e.g., $25/hour), the reduction will be much greater than 1/3 of normal pay.

**What are the eligibility requirements for using EPSL?**

All eligible SSA employees may use EPSL from April 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020. Full-time employees may use no more than 80 hours of EPSL and part-time employees may use up to an equal number of hours they would normally work in a two-week period. Employees are eligible for this leave if they are unable to work (including telework) because of one of the following circumstances:
1. The employee is subject to a Federal, State, or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID–19.
2. The employee has been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine due to concerns related to COVID–19.
3. The employee is experiencing symptoms of COVID–19 and seeking a medical diagnosis. For example, EPSL applies to time the employee is unable to work because the employee is taking affirmative steps to obtain a medical diagnosis, such as making, waiting for, or attending an appointment for a test for COVID-19.
4. The employee is caring for an individual related to COVID-19. 
   NOTE: Care for an individual extends to an employee’s immediate family member, a person who regularly resides in the employee’s home, or a similar person with whom the employee has a personal relationship that creates an expectation that the employee would care for the person if he or she were quarantined or self-quarantined.
5. The employee is caring for his or her son or daughter if the school or place of care of a minor son or daughter has been closed, or the childcare provider of such son or daughter is unavailable, for reasons related to COVID–19.
   NOTE: This qualifying circumstance applies only when an employee needs to, and actually is, caring for the employee’s son or daughter and if the employee is unable to work (including telework) as a result of providing care.

Employees cannot use EPSL if they decide to self-quarantine for an illness without medical advice, even if they have COVID-19 symptoms.

**How do employees use EPSL?**

Effective pay period 2020-15 (July 5- July 18), employees must record their use of EPSL in webTA using the accurate pay codes (see above).

Prior to July 13, 2020, SSA made available an interim process to use WSL in lieu of EPSL, up to a max of 80 hours to eligible full-time employees or the equivalent number of hours in part-time employees’ regular biweekly work schedules. With the updates to the agency’s timekeeping system, supervisors will email those employees who used the interim process to inform them of the following items. Employees must respond by email to acknowledge they understand the information below in accordance with their signed EPSL request.

- The corrections will be made to their timesheets, changing WSL to EPSL.
- An overpayment may be issued.
- The debt will not be waived.

EPSL is available through December 31, 2020. Eligible employees must complete and submit the form below to their supervisors one time, selecting all possible reasons they will use EPSL. Employees will document the specific reason on the timesheet (see below). By signing the form, employees attest they meet the qualifying reason for EPSL.

[EPSL Request Memo](Union Notice Attachment #2 - March 15, 2021)
Will my supervisor correct my timesheet to change personal leave or 061 - Administrative Weather & Safety Used to the new EPSL coding?

Yes, supervisors will process a correction to any timesheet for eligible employees who have used their personal leave or WSL in lieu of EPSL since April 1, 2020 for a maximum of 80 hours for full time employees or an equivalent number of hours based on part-time employees’ regular biweekly work schedules.

Employees who used WSL in lieu of EPSL submitted the EPSL Request Memo form to their supervisors, acknowledging they understood using WSL in lieu of EPSL may result in overpayment, for which they will receive a debt letter from the agency’s payroll provider, the Department of Interior, at a later date. Employees will not be eligible for waivers of overpayment and will be required to repay the debt according to our payroll provider’s instructions, as they are aware EPSL is payable at a reduced rate.

What documentation must I provide to use EPSL?

Employees must submit the EPSL Request Memo (see above) one time, indicating all possible reasons for using EPSL. No additional documentation is required.

Must I use EPSL in full day increments? If not, what is the minimum amount of EPSL I may use?

Consistent with our other leave policies, SSA employees may use EPSL in increments of 15 minutes. Employees must also include a pay period remark documenting the reason they used EPSL for each occurrence (see above).

Will I accrue leave at a reduced rate when I use EPSL?

No, employees will earn leave at their regular rate.

If I do not wish to incur an overpayment for EPSL, can my supervisor approve a combination of WSL and LWOP in lieu of EPSL to avoid an overpayment?

No, supervisors may not approve any combination of LWOP and WSL in lieu of EPSL in an attempt to circumvent the payroll system and arrive at an amount that would avoid overpayment (i.e., 2/3 of a day or 2/3 of an hour). Doing so will trigger an individual audit to the correct employee’s pay once EPSL is available. If you have any questions about using LWOP in other circumstances (e.g., after you exhaust EPSL or personal leave or for a family medical emergency), please consult your supervisor.

If I incur a debt using WSL in lieu of EPSL, will our payroll provider allow an extended payment plan? If so, how long will I have to repay the debt?
Yes, you may request an extended payment plan. Under a payment plan, debts are generally collected in 26 equal installments, with the minimum payment amount being the lesser of $25 or 15% of your disposable pay. Debts must be paid within one year.

**I usually work a part or all of my tour of duty at night (i.e., from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.)**

**Am I eligible for night premium pay (also known as night differential) for EPSL hours I use?**

No, employees are not eligible for night premium pay for EPSL hours used at night.

**I usually work a part or all of my tour of duty at night (i.e., from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.)**

**Do EPSL hours count toward the 8-hour rule for earning night premium pay while on leave?**

No. EPSL hours are not considered in applying the 8-hour rule for earning night premium pay while on leave.

**As a part-time employee, am I subject to the $200/day cap for care of a dependent?**

Yes, the $200/day cap for dependent care applies regardless of an employee’s work schedule.

**Should I continue to schedule and use my annual leave during the COVID-19 pandemic even though I am precluded from using my leave as I would like (e.g., vacation, travel)?**

Yes, you should continue to request, schedule, and use your annual leave for other purposes (e.g., time-off work, rest, etc.). Annual leave in excess of your annual leave ceiling will be forfeited if not used by the final day of the leave year. Leave that is forfeited will not be eligible for leave restoration. Leave restoration only applies when you are prevented from taking annual leave due to administrative error, exigency of public business, or prolonged illness/injury.

**Am I eligible for the higher annual leave carryover limit Congress established for leave year 2021?**

Under section 1111 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), enacted on January 1, 2021, Congress established higher annual leave carryover limits for certain employees whose excess leave was or would have been forfeited on January 3, 2021. This higher limit is only applicable for leave year 2021. As SSA consistently advised employees to use their annual leave throughout the year to avoid excess annual leave forfeiture, very few SSA employees are eligible for these increased limits.

The Office of Personnel (OPE) reviewed payroll records to identify employees who lost leave at the end of the 2020 leave year, and will work with component management to determine whether these employees are eligible for restoration under regular leave restoration rules or the NDAA.
authority. If components identify any eligible employees, our payroll provider will restore the excess leave to employees’ records. Eligible employees’ leave and earnings statements (LES) and webTA will show the correction as restored annual leave approximately two pay periods after February 19, 2021.

Eligible employees must use any annual leave in excess of the normal carryover limit in leave year 2021. Any unused excess annual leave not used by January 1, 2022 will be forfeit. In addition, employees must use excess annual leave resulting from increased carryover limits before using any other annual leave available to them (e.g., annual leave accrued in past years, annual leave accrued during leave year 2021, advanced annual leave, donated annual leave, and restored leave). Excess annual leave hours carried over into 2021 are not eligible for donation and cannot be paid out if employees separate before using the hours.

May I request administrative leave to donate blood under the provisions of Personnel Policy Manual chapter S630_9, section 5.2.2. and AFGE Article 31, section 3C?

The Agency recognizes the importance of donating blood, especially during public health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. If operational needs permit, your supervisor may approve administrative leave for blood donation. Requests for administrative leave for blood donations must be determined in advance.

Do I need to inform my supervisor if I receive a COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available?

We encourage all employees who are eligible for vaccination to pursue vaccination per your state and/or local procedures. Similarly, if your local health department offers vaccination to your office, we encourage you to register. You are not required to tell your manager if you have received a vaccine, which vaccine you received, or if you received one or two doses. If you voluntarily share this information, it will help us inform health departments of vaccine counts.

Which states are giving access to SSA employees for vaccination?

SSA has contacted each state and territory’s health department to ask about vaccinations for SSA employees. Thus far, the following states have indicated that employees can register now and we have shared information with employees through regional messages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Link</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Samoa</td>
<td>SSA is working directly with American Samoa to facilitate vaccination for SSA employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>SSA is providing Hawaii with employee information needed for registration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho (on-site staff only)</td>
<td><a href="https://healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/covid-19-vaccination">https://healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/covid-19-vaccination</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td><a href="https://govstatus.egov.com/kentucky-vaccine-map">https://govstatus.egov.com/kentucky-vaccine-map</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
N. Marianna Islands  https://www.vaccinatecnmi.com/

Nevada
Southern Nevada Health District:
http://covid.southernnevadahealthdistrict.org/vaccine/distribution/#tier1
For those employees outside of Clark County, SSA is providing Nevada with employee information needed for registration.

North Dakota https://www.health.nd.gov/covidvaccinelocator

U.S. Virgin Islands
SSA is providing the U.S. Virgin Islands with employee information needed for registration.


The following states have advised us that they are working primarily on a basis of age groups or risk categories based on medical conditions. We recommend reviewing their websites to register when you are eligible:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td><a href="https://www.azdhs.gov/index.php">https://www.azdhs.gov/index.php</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td><a href="https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/">https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td><a href="https://idph.iowa.gov/Emerging-Health-Issues/Novel-Coronavirus/Vaccine/Information-for-the-Public">https://idph.iowa.gov/Emerging-Health-Issues/Novel-Coronavirus/Vaccine/Information-for-the-Public</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td><a href="https://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/_static/14,22816,420,976.html">https://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/_static/14,22816,420,976.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td><a href="https://covid.ri.gov/vaccination#elig">https://covid.ri.gov/vaccination#elig</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td><a href="https://coronavirus.utah.gov/vaccine-distribution/">https://coronavirus.utah.gov/vaccine-distribution/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We will continue to update these lists as we receive information so please check back.

How can I show a vaccine provider that I am an essential government worker?

SSA is providing the letter below to employees to share with vaccine providers. All SSA employees are considered “Other Essential Personnel” under the CDC recommendations for Phase 1C. States differ in their approaches, so not all states will register individuals based on occupation and state timing for occupation-based registration may vary. If you are attempting to register for vaccination, you may use this letter to demonstrate that you are an essential government employee by filling in your name and presenting it with your badge. Use of this letter is limited to SSA employees only (not contractors or affiliates). Your provider will follow state guidelines regarding whether to prioritize your appointment.
May I receive administrative leave to get the COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available?

SSA will provide up to 4 hours of administrative leave per vaccination shot (up to 8 hours total for two-shot vaccines) for the 2021 national vaccination effort. With supervisory approval, employees will enter the time in webTA as code 060 – Administrative Leave Other and add a pay period remark stating “XX/XX/XX Administrative Leave for COVID 2021.” Employees experiencing an adverse reaction to vaccination should follow the self-screening protocol above and utilize WAHQ, if they have portable work, or request personal leave if they are too ill to work. When employees experience symptoms, it may not be possible to tell immediately the difference between a vaccine adverse reaction and COVID-19 onset, so it is very important to remain out of the office, as necessary.

What do I need to do about my participation in the SSA Transit Subsidy Program?

Employees should continue to follow the SSA Transit Subsidy Program policy and take an active role in managing their transit benefit amount and purchase only what is needed for actual commutes to work at the office. Below are some helpful reminders:

- **Participants who are not commuting should disable automatic billing for vanpools and renewable monthly orders of commuter tickets during this time,** as they should only make charges when they are actively commuting from home-to-work and back. Vanpool participants should consult directly with their vanpool coordinator operator to disable reoccurring billing during this time.
- **Credit limits on TRANServe Credit Cards remain available as normal.** If you are not commuting to work, you should not use these funds. Unused funds will be returned to the agency at the end of the month.
- **As usual, participants should not establish auto-pay or automatic reload agreements with transit authorities to fund local fare cards.**
- **Visit transit authorities’ websites or social media pages for updates regularly.** Participants commuting to work using mass transit during this time should remain up to date with local transit authorities regarding any additional impacts to mass transit service.
- **If you have questions, please contact your supervisor and Transit Subsidy Coordinator.**

May I make a change to my Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account (DCFSA) election in response to changing dependent care needs during the COVID-19 pandemic?
Yes. Changes to a DCFSA election mid-year are permissible if you have experienced a Qualifying Life Event (QLE). Two QLEs that many have experienced recently are:

- A change in employment status for you, your spouse or dependent
- A change in cost or coverage of your dependent care services

The change to an account must be consistent with the reason for the change. For example, if a dependent care provider is no longer providing care (i.e., before/after care/daycare closes, summer day camp cancels or care is no longer needed), the election can be reduced. Similarly, if you need supplemental child or adult care due to an increase in hours worked, you may increase your election.

Participants may submit a QLE in their online account at www.FSAFEDS.com or by calling 1-877-FSAFEDS (372-3337).

**Is there any additional cleaning planned or required for offices based on CDC guidance?**

GSA will be enhancing the daily cleaning of high touch surfaces in common areas (not personal workspaces). The CDC recommends performing routine environmental cleaning, which includes:

- Routinely cleaning all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.
- No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time.
- Use disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by employees before each use.

SSA management will arrange for additional cleaning protocols according to CDC guidance for facilities where COVID-19 exposure has been confirmed and employees must enter buildings. Please note that if facilities are left vacant for 7 days, CDC guidance indicates that only normal cleaning protocols are required.

If employees have additional concerns, they clean their personal spaces using pre-approved disinfectant and/or alcohol wipes, and follow CDC guidelines for hand hygiene.

Employees should not ask SSA contractors to perform additional cleaning duties. Managers must work with the appropriate contracting officer representative on any tasks for contractors.

**Where can I find additional information about COVID-19?**

Additional information is available on the CDC’s website.

**What else can I do to protect myself from other respiratory illnesses?**
The CDC estimates 19 million people were infected with the seasonal influenza virus last year in the United States with approximately 10,000 flu-related deaths. Vaccination along with good hand hygiene significantly reduce your risk of becoming ill. Please visit the Medical Office Influenza Vaccination Program website for additional information.

There are also several additional vaccines recommended to protect adults and those around them from certain diseases. Vaccines are safe, effective, and save lives. Please watch the brief VOD for information on other adult immunizations, then talk to your primary care provider to determine what immunizations are right for you.

The SSA Medical Office will continually monitor updated information to ensure that SSA is following the CDC recommendations needed to keep our workforce healthy.

The medical information in this fact sheet is provided as guidance by the SSA Medical Office using information from the National Institutes of Health and the Public Health Service of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This document may be distributed to SSA employees but may not be modified without the express written permission of the Medical Office. For further information, contact the Medical Office at (410) 965-4607.

SSA Medical Office Updated: 3/12/2021