



## COVID-19 FAQ

This document includes questions and answers on flexibilities and authorities related to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Additions and revisions will be noted. The Q&A includes sections on: A) remote work, B) leave, C) COVID-19 protocols, D) technology services and resources, and E) benefits.

### A. Remote Work

#### A1) How are temporary changes in our work going to be handled during periods of remote work?

In order to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus, social distancing, prohibitions on large group gatherings and other strategies are being implemented. That translates into temporary changes for many of our employees' work. The agency intends to be as flexible as possible to provide a variety of work options during this public health situation.

In addition to typical job duties, the supervisor may also consider whether an employee has some portable duties (e.g., reading reports; analyzing documents and studies; preparing written letters, memorandums, reports and other correspondence; setting up conference calls; or other tasks that do not require the employee to be physically present), that would allow him/her to carry out remote work on a situational basis.

#### A2) What preparations are necessary for employees to work at home?

Click here for [tips on preparing for and working at home](#).

#### A3) If an employee needs to incur additional costs due to working from home, may an agency provide payments to offset those expenses?

Per the [Telecommuting Administrative Memorandum](#) (#509), the agency will typically provide the equipment and materials needed by employees to effectively perform their duties. However, employees may be authorized to use their own equipment. Employees must receive prior approval from their supervisor for any proposed expenditures due to telecommuting.

#### A4) In the event that local school systems and daycare facilities are closed due to COVID-19, may an employee perform remote work with a child in the home?

Yes. In this situation, work schedules may also be altered to accommodate child care responsibilities during the day.

#### A5) What happens if an employee does not have a sufficient amount of remote work to perform to cover the entire workday?

An employee performing remote work who does not have enough work must notify his or her supervisor and receive additional assignments, if available. If employees and temporary workers don't have the option of remote work for all or part of their regular workday, but are otherwise able to work, they may be placed on paid administrative leave in ready to work status as approved by the supervisor. See detailed information about administrative leave below.

## B. Leave

### B1) What is the purpose of administrative leave?

Administrative leave with pay may be granted by the Commissioner due to natural disasters, public health emergencies, inclement weather or local work-related emergencies (e.g., flooded office). Typically, administrative leave is granted when employees cannot work through no fault of their own or are asked not to report to work.

### B2) What are qualified uses of administrative leave and what approvals are necessary? Updated 4/30/20

Administrative leave may be taken when you are unable to work because you:

- 1) are subject to a federal, state or local quarantine or isolation order,
- 2) have been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine,
- 3) are experiencing symptoms associated with COVID-19 and is seeking a medical diagnosis,
- 4) are caring for an individual subject to a quarantine or isolation order,
- 5) are caring for a child whose school or place of care is closed to the child's physical presence or unavailable due to coronavirus-related reasons,
- 6) are experiencing any other substantially similar condition specified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services ([not yet specified](#)), or
- 7) have insufficient remote work or lack the resources needed to perform remote work.

Employees are responsible for advising their supervisor of the qualifying need for administrative leave, receiving prior authorization for administrative leave, and submitting administrative leave requests in Kronos using the appropriate leave codes.

### B3) Who is eligible for administrative leave?

Full-time and part-time (on a prorated basis) regular employees, SOS temporary workers, and employee/employer contractors are eligible for administrative leave.

### B4) If an employee was already on other leave (e.g., sick, vacation, Family/Medical Leave) when administrative leave was granted, how does that affect the employee's leave status? Updated 5/21/20

The approved leave status that preceded the administrative leave would be maintained unless the absence qualifies as one of the COVID 19 reasons listed in B2.

### B5) What is the guidance if an employee has been exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19?

Employees should follow the direction of health care professionals. Employees directed to quarantine would be expected to remote work if asymptomatic. If the employee becomes symptomatic (ill) due to COVID-19, administrative leave would apply.

### B6) What are the leave options for an employee who personally becomes ill with the COVID-19 virus or is caring for a qualifying immediate family member who is ill with the COVID-19 virus? Updated 5/21/20

Administrative leave. Administrative may be available for the circumstances listed in B2.

Sick leave and sick leave advancement. Sick leave may be used. If sick leave is depleted, sick leave may be advanced per §15.2G2 of the [bargaining agreement](#) and Chapter 9, §005.08 of the [NDE Personnel Rules](#), to

employees with six months of service with the agency, in an amount not to exceed that which the employee would earn in the following six pay periods.

Use vacation leave or compensatory time. Vacation leave or compensatory time may be used for the same purposes as sick leave.

Catastrophic leave. Policies governing Catastrophic Leave can be found in §15.18 of the bargaining agreement and Chapter 9, §013 of the NDE Personnel Rules.

Unpaid leave. Family Medical Leave, which is unpaid leave, may be an option if eligibility criteria are met. For more information about Family Medical Leave, see §15.16 of the Bargaining Agreement and Chapter 9, §0007 of the NDE Personnel Rules. See also Q&A B8 for information about Extended Family Medical Leave. Information about Leave Without Pay may be found in §§15.2G1 and 15.5F of the bargaining agreement and Chapter 9, §§004.07 and 005.13 of the NDE Personnel Rules.

**B7) Is employment impacted if an employee is absent due to a COVID-10 related absence?**

No adverse employment action will be taken due to qualified absences in response to the COVID-19 virus and such absences will be considered authorized and excused.

**B8) Will the Family Medical Leave Act apply to employee absences due to the COVID-19 virus? Updated 5/21/20**

Absences for the Covid-19 reasons listed in B2, except for #5, will not be charged against eligible Family Medical Leave (FML) time. Employees will not experience or be subject to adverse employment action due to absences related to COVID-19.

Expanded (Paid) Family and Medical Leave. This is available only when employees who cannot work because their children's school or place of childcare is closed due to Covid-19 (reason #5 in B2). Since the Commissioner authorized administrative leave for this same purpose, it is not necessary for employees to apply for this. However, if employees are granted Expanded Family and Medical Leave it does count toward the twelve-week maximum of Family and Medical Leave within a twelve-month period. EFML is not in addition to regular Family and Medical Leave. [Click here for more information.](#)

**B9) What leave codes are used for Covid-19 administrative leave purposes? NEW 5/21/20**

The following new leave codes have been developed to document the use of administrative leave for Covid-19 purposes.

- **COSLF** (Covid Self-care) – Administrative leave for qualifying reasons 1-3 above
- **COCAR** (Covid Care for Others) – Administrative leave for qualifying reasons 4 & 6 above
- **ADMIN** (Ready to Work) – Available to work but unable to telework
- **COVID** (Care for Child) – Administrative leave for reason 5 above if not requesting Family Medical Leave (FML)
- **COVFM** (Covid Family Medical Leave) – \*For Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) qualifying reason 5 above, if requested and approved for EFML for this reason; or approved for regular FML for your own, or a family member's, serious health condition.

The codes listed above were available to select when making a leave request in Kronos beginning with the biweekly pay period that started on 4/27/20. Please continue to put comments in the request to further identify the need for the use of the leave.

**B10) Do employees need to provide a doctor's note to justify an absence other than their own quarantine or their own illness due to the COVID-19 virus?**

No. A doctor's note is not required when employees:

- stay home due to the quarantine, or for the care of, an immediate family member
- stay home with their children due to school or daycare closures
- are not able to work full-time due to the need to care for children or a family member ill from COVID-19

**B11) Do employees need to provide a doctor's release to return to work after their own diagnosed illness or quarantine due to the COVID-19 virus? 5/21/20**

While the employee must be released to return to work by their medical provider, a written doctor's note generally will not be required.

## **C. COVID-19 Protocols**

**C1) If an employee comes to work and shows symptoms of illness, what should the supervisor do? May the employee be sent home, and if so, for how long? What is needed before the employee can return to work?**

When a supervisor observes an employee at the workplace exhibiting medical symptoms, encourage the employee to request sick leave and seek medical attention as appropriate.

The CDC recommends that employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e., cough, shortness of breath) at work should be separated from other employees and sent home immediately. Sick employees should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or an elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available).

If an employee is diagnosed with COVID-19, he or she should not return to work until they are released by their medical provider and meet all of the following requirements:

- free from fever without the use of fever-reducing medications
- no longer showing symptoms, including cough, and
- has tested negative on at least two consecutive respiratory specimens collected at least 24 hours apart

**C2) Can the agency mandate an employee exposed to or infected with COVID-19 to remain away from the workplace for a specified period?**

The CDC or other health agency will provide information related to the length of time an individual remains contagious, as well as current recommendations for social distancing, etc. For information specific to COVID-19, please view the [CDC's web site](#). In the case of an epidemic or pandemic, the agency may take actions aimed at preventing the spread of disease per guidance or directive of public health officials regarding the general danger to public health.

Generally, the agency will not prohibit an employee from reporting to work unless it has evidence or a reasonable concern that an employee is physically unable to perform his/her job, or his/her presence in the workplace poses a risk of infection to others. Sick employees should take leave and not report to work.

**C3) Under what circumstances will the agency communicate to employees that there is a confirmed case among one or more of its employees (without identifying the person/specific office)?**

The infected employee's privacy should be protected to the greatest extent possible; therefore, his or her identity should not be disclosed. In an outbreak of quarantinable communicable disease or COVID-19, management should share only that information determined to be necessary to protect the health of the employees in the workplace but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Supervisors

should consult with HR to determine what information is releasable. Employees exposed to a co-worker with confirmed COVID-19 should refer to CDC guidance for [how to conduct a risk assessment](#) of their potential exposure.

If social distancing, information sharing, or other precautions to assist employees in recognizing symptoms or reducing the spread of the illness can be taken without disclosing information related to a specific employee, that is the preferred approach.

Supervisors should treat this situation as they would any other illness in the workplace and continue to protect employee privacy interests while providing sufficient information to all employees related to protecting themselves against the spread of illness.

#### **C4) How will questions related to the COVID-19 situation be handled?**

Employees and supervisors may submit questions on the [COVID-19 webpage for employees](#). Frequently asked questions will be added to this Q&A. Employees may also consult their supervisor or office administrator.

#### **C5) What actions were taken by the agency to address the COVID-19 outbreak?**

Here are some of the action steps being undertaken:

- Activation of additional VPN accounts to allow employees remote access to electronic files
- Creation of a dedicated COVID-19 webpage to provide information to employees
- Preparation of guidance regarding the use of VPN and remote email
- Monitoring employee health status on an agency-wide basis
- Communicating regularly with state public health experts
- Developing guidance such as this Q&A document
- Potential activation of the agency's Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP)

#### **C6) Can an employee refuse to come to work because of fear of infection? NEW 5/21/20**

The health and safety of our employees is a top priority as illustrated by the safeguards taken to date. The agency continues to adapt to the pandemic situation as it evolves. Employees who are unable to work remotely, and have been using administrative leave, may be required to perform work tasks in the office as long as it is safe to do so per public health standards. Such employees will be provided personal protective equipment (e.g., masks, gloves) and disinfecting supplies. In addition, social distancing standards will be applied.

Employees are only entitled to refuse to work if they believe they are in imminent danger (i.e., conditions or practices that can reasonably be expected to cause death or serious physical harm).

## **D. TECHNOLOGY SERVICES & RESOURCES**

#### **D1) What if I need technology to work from home?**

The department continuously accepts input on staff technology needs and requirements, via surveys and helpdesk requests via email at [nde.networkhelp@nebraska.gov](mailto:nde.networkhelp@nebraska.gov). There are a limited number of laptops that can be issued to those employees who do not already have a department issued laptop, or a usable personal computer at home.

#### **D2) What is VPN and how do I get it?**

A VPN, or Virtual Private Network, allows you to create a secure connection to another network over the Internet. VPNs can be used to access region-restricted websites, connect directly into the State and NDE Networks (e.g., InsideNDE, or the O Drive, P Drive, etc.) from home or outside of the agency.

Technology Services has been working to set up a VPN for all NDE employees. The mechanism for accessing the VPN varies depending the device and location. The instructions for the different approaches are available at: <https://insidende.education.ne.gov/offices/technical-services/vpn-instructions>

Once you have been notified of that a VPN account has been established, please use the instructions to establish the appropriate connection.

**D3) Can I take my monitor and other technology devices (e.g., docking station, keyboard) home with me? NEW 5/21/20**

Technology Care Packages, consisting of a display, mouse & keyboard, and a dock (where applicable), were provided to staff who requested them.

If you missed out on the initial deployment, there will be a chance to request a care package again, as the Technology Services team plans on doing those in waves. For any other technology needs, please send an email to [nde.networkhelp@nebraska.gov](mailto:nde.networkhelp@nebraska.gov).

**D4) How do I get a Zoom Account? Is there a brief tutorial on how to use it available?**

Go to <https://insidende.education.ne.gov/offices/communications/zoom-help-and-tutorials> to request a Zoom account and access a series of videos and tutorials available.

If you don't have a Zoom account, you can still access "Zoom meetings" that are held through a web browser or on your phone with the meeting ID provided.

**D5) How do I best get Help Desk Support?**

In order to best serve you, if you have email access, please email [nde.networkhelp@nebraska.gov](mailto:nde.networkhelp@nebraska.gov). Do not email specific Technology Services staff individually as the use of a ticketing system allows multiple people work through the issues and track, which is especially helpful if a specific person is unavailable for a period of time.

If you are unable to email and need to address an issue by phone, please call 402-471-0959 and leave a voicemail if no one is available. Do not call Technology Services staff directly.

For problems with passwords in the **Payroll & Financial Center (JD Edwards/E1), Employee Work Center (Workday) or the Employee Development Center (EDC)** please call 402-471-6234.

**D6) Do I need special headphones/microphones to use the computer at home?**

Often helpful in the online "Zoom" meeting environments is the use of headphones and a microphone. Most laptops have a built-in microphone and camera, but in the absence of these resources one can use a phone to dial in to meetings.

However, USB-based headphones OR some headphones provided with a cell phone have the capacity to both listen and talk and can be plugged into most all devices to connect to a meeting.

**D7) What do I need to remember about cyber-security hygiene?**

Working from home may provide a sense of security from the outside world. However, there will continue to be not so friendly actors lurking online. The COVID-19 situation has led to an increasing number of people working from home. These newly remote workers (and you!) have become an appealing target for hackers, phishing, social engineering and other nefarious efforts.

Practice safe computing while at home just as you would at work. **Here are some tips:**

- Don't click on links that you don't recognize.
- Don't open attachments if you are not expecting them.
- Ensure that your virus protection and firewall are up to date on your personal devices.
- And most importantly, exercise caution. If you aren't certain about something do not hesitate to reach out to Technology Services at [nde.networkhelp@nebraska.gov](mailto:nde.networkhelp@nebraska.gov).

## E. Benefits

### E1) Does my state insurance offer virtual visits? **NEW 5/21/20**

Yes! Teledoc/Telehealth visits are part of the state's insurance plan. Visits are free for employees on the Wellness and Regular health plans and are 20% after the deductible has been met for Consumer Focused Health Plan. For issues specifically related to the COVID-19 virus, the Consumer Focused High Deductible plan and the HD plans with the Direct Primary Care plans will have virtual visits available to employees for free as well.

### E2) How do I access a virtual visit? **NEW 5/21/20**

To access a virtual visit please follow the instructions listed below:

- **Navigation.** Log in to [www.myuhc.com](http://www.myuhc.com) or the UHC App and click on "Virtual Visits." Choose a provider group and click through to their website. Once you make that choice, you leave [www.myuhc.com](http://www.myuhc.com) and go directly to their selected provider group's page. (Please note: Teledoc is accessible directly from [myuhc.com](http://myuhc.com) landing page. AmWell and Doctors on Demand (DOD) are accessible via each respective app or website.)
- **Register.** Each virtual visit provider group will require you to register – similar to "in-person" visits to a brick-and mortar clinic. Registration typically includes providing the name of the patient, health insurance, pharmacy, and other general health information. There is no charge for virtual visits specific to COVID-19. Otherwise, you are required to pay at time of service. (WellNebraska and the Regular Plan cover virtual visits at 100%.)
- **Request a Visit.** Once registered, you will request a visit and move into a virtual waiting room.
- **Connect to Physician.** During your visit, you will be asked to describe your symptoms and health concerns.
- **Diagnosis and Prescription.** The treating physician will provide a diagnosis and likely ask about your primary care physician so any notes can be shared. The virtual visit physician will then create an integrated medical record with full documentation. You can access this record once the visit is complete so you can email it or print and bring it to your primary care physician. If required, the virtual visit doctor can write a prescription that is sent electronically to your chosen pharmacy, where you can pick it up.

### E3) Can employees change their dependent flexible spending account (FSA) election for the 2019-20 plan year or use that money for purposes other than child care? **NEW 5/21/20**

Yes. During Open Enrollment each year, employees may elect flex deductions for daycare. COVID-19 closures of daycares, preschools, and schools are considered a qualifying event for a Dependent Care FSA. As a result, qualifying employees will be allowed to increase, decrease, or stop current deductions. If employees would like to make changes to their current deduction, they should contact the Wellness and Benefits team ([as.employeebenefits@nebraska.gov](mailto:as.employeebenefits@nebraska.gov)). During Open Enrollment, employees will again have the opportunity to make elections for the next plan year. At that time, employees may also adjust their deductions for 2020-2021 as appropriate to their situation.

### E4) Can employees change their medical flexible spending account election for the 2019-20 plan year? **Revised 5/21/20**

Initially, the answer was no. However, updated IRS guidance enables greater flexibility than normal due to the current public health emergency. Any remaining Medical FSA balance for the 2019-20 plan year will be extended to October 31, 2020, and the grace period for all receipts to be submitted for reimbursement will be extended to December 31, 2020. **This extension of your Medical FSA balance is automatic and does not require any action from you.**

The CARES Act, enacted in April, removed the prescription requirement for medical FSA purchases and is now allowing the purchase of over-the-counter drugs and medicines using teammates' FSA. This means things such as aspirin, allergy medications, pain relievers, menstrual care products, etc. are eligible to be purchased using your FSA. Check out the [list of covered items](#) on [www.asiflex.com](http://www.asiflex.com) to maximize the use of your medical flex money.

**E5) Does my short-term disability insurance cover COVID-19? NEW 5/21/20**

Your short-term disability insurance may cover COVID-19 if:

- You are placed in a medically recommended quarantine or isolation without the ability to work. (You would need to file all appropriate claims and materials to apply.)

Or if:

- You are diagnosed with COVID-19 and are too ill to work. (You would need to file all appropriate claims and materials to apply.)

Your short-term disability insurance may **NOT** cover COVID-19 if:

- You are placed in a medically recommended quarantine or isolation but you are able (not ill) to work remotely.

Note: The State of Nebraska has no authority to approve or deny any short-term disability claim. That decision rests solely with United Health Care and the determination is made from the information that is received from the employee, Human Resources, and the physician.

**E6) How are other insurance benefit coverages affected by COVID-19? NEW 5/21/20**

COVID-19 Tests/Medical Visits. As of 3/1/2020, COVID-19 diagnostic testing and the testing kits are covered at 100% (no employee cost share) and this applies to all plans. Office visits and/or hospitalization will be covered by state insurance with the appropriate co-pays and deductibles as it relates to the plan in which the employee participates.

Prescriptions. Optum Rx through United HealthCare, our pharmacy vendor, will be allowing employees to refill their prescription early. Employees should to contact their pharmacy or call the phone number listed on the back of the UHC card for assistance.