

Returning to FNS Facilities

As Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) offices and facilities across the country begin the process of reopening, this living document will serve as a repository of answers to questions submitted through the Administrator's feedback form for FNS employees during this transition back to the office. We will continue to monitor the feedback site and will update this document with new and/or expounded answers. This document will reside on the home page of the FNS intranet site.

The majority of the questions submitted were duplicated or had a common theme. For efficiency and ease of understanding, questions were grouped together into topics with answers and other pertinent information listed below that topic.

DECISIONS

The [USDA Reopening Playbook Summary](#) was created for USDA facilities following the White House guidance issued on April 20, 2020 "[Opening America Up Again](#)." The playbook outlines a three-phased approach for a gradual, efficient, and safe reopening based on the advice of public health experts. Reopening decisions are made by each facility in consultation with their Mission Area or Agency and the Department, and decisions are dictated based on facility location, not where an individual employee resides.

The Secretary directed the Department to consider local data in the communities surrounding a facility and any directives of local and state governments as well as ensure the facility meets federal gating criteria as outlined in guidance provided by OMB and OPM. To ensure coordination across the National Capital Region (NCR), all USDA facilities in the NCR are generally following the phases of the District of Columbia (DC) government and taking into consideration the reopening of Northern Virginia and Maryland. For FNS offices located outside of the Washington, D.C. area, FNS leadership is coordinating with local and state government agencies and with the Federal Executive Boards for each of the regions. The Secretary has given Mission Areas the flexibility to address employees' needs throughout all phases.

Before reopening FNS facilities, FNS leaders are using USDA's COVID-19 Dashboard to assist in the decision whether it is appropriate to reopen. The Dashboard is updated every Sunday and the 14-day downward trajectory is calculated on a week by week basis running Sunday to Saturday. The COVID-19 Dashboard consists of:

- County-level Hospital Bed Usage Data
 - Data is sourced from the National Healthcare Safety Network, American Hospital Association, and TeleTracking.

- County-level Testing Data
 - Data is sourced from the Public Health Laboratory Interoperability Project.
- COVID-19 Cases
 - Data is sourced from John Hopkins University Center of Systems Science and Engineering.

Along with Dashboard data, the following considerations are taken into account –

- a) Establishing appropriate workforce schedules and meeting protocol to ensure mitigation practices can be implemented.
- b) Assessing the ability to practice social distancing within the facility during each phase.
- c) Determining additional equipment or supplies needed to comply with [CDC](#) and [OSHA](#) guidelines and best practices.

In the event that the 14-day trajectory changes and a resurgence of COVID-19 cases occur, dashboard data will be used to evaluate next steps.

Employees will not receive hazard pay for returning to work. If we receive any more information on this topic from the Department, we will share with staff.

FACE COVERINGS

As USDA begins its reopening process, FNS will provide cloth face coverings to all employees. Face coverings are to be used by all employees in their office space and when engaged in any in-person human interactions when away from their desk until further notice. This includes, but is not limited to, when employees enter and exit the building, walk in the hallways, ride elevators, enter bathrooms, and attend in person meetings. FNS-provided face coverings can be laundered up to 30 times. Employees who wish to use their own personal face covering or mask may do so as long as it meets the [CDC recommendations](#).

- All staff, visitors, and contractors are always expected to wear a face covering or mask.
- FNS will provide face coverings to employees and contractors, but visitors are expected to utilize their own face covering or mask.
- USDA will refuse entry to visitors who do not comply.
- Employees will not be issued a new face covering every day. Employees who need a face covering may request from upon entry to the facility or by coordinating with a supervisor. We expect employees to average a total of 2-3 FNS-provided face coverings per employee over the course of all reopening phases, given these face coverings are reusable and washable.

An employee who is the sole occupant of a private office or in a shared office where social distancing (six feet or more of separation) can be maintained is not required to wear a face covering or mask when separated via proper social distancing.

Employees who indicate they have a medical condition that prevents or prohibits the use of a face covering or mask or requires an alternative type of face covering or mask should seek a Reasonable Accommodation.

The Department will not be providing gloves or goggles.

TELEWORK and CAREGIVING

Telework will continue to be leveraged throughout all phases of reopening for employees and contractors.

Phase 2

- Employees and contractors returning to the office in Phase 2 will be composed of the workforce that have a practical and operational need to be onsite to ensure customer service and delivery of USDA's mission.
- Employees, who have self-certified as COVID-19 high risk as outlined by the CDC, and are in positions identified as non-telework eligible, will continue to receive weather and safety leave through Phase 2.

Phase 3

- All Employees and contractors are scheduled to return to the office throughout this phase.
- All employees who have self-certified in Phases 1 and 2 due to a medical condition considered COVID-19 high risk and are requesting to continue to telework are required to provide medical documentation and should follow the Reasonable Accommodation process. The FNS point of contact for more information on this process and the medical documentation required is the HR Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator: Sheila Kopczynski. She can be reached by phone at 208-202-2811 and by e-mail at Sheila.Kopczynski@usda.gov.
- If an employee is seeking continued telework options for any of the Playbook Phases and it is for COVID-19 High Risk due to being **65 years or older- Non-Medical** or for **caregiving responsibilities**, the Reasonable Accommodation process is not applicable. Reasonable Accommodations are for the employee who has a medical condition to be able to continue successfully performing his or her duties. However, there are other tools that the employee with his or her supervisor may utilize as a combination or individually; examples: work schedules, leave options, and/or telework to help address the situation. This OPM website provides options: <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/covid-19/>

Caregiving Phase 2 & 3

- Employees with caregiving responsibilities due to closures (daycare, school, and summer camp) and other dependent care obligations, or who live with a person identified by CDC as COVID-19 high risk may be eligible for a full spectrum of available workplace flexibilities, including telework and flexible work schedules, and need to discuss their situation with their immediate supervisor.

There is no change to the USDA telework policy that is in place at this time.

SOCIAL DISTANCING IN OFFICE SPACE

In identifying the number of employees who will return on-site in Phase 2, office configurations were assessed to ensure social distancing (at least 6 feet) can be maintained between individual and shared workspaces. We will follow and promote the [CDC Guidance](#) for Practicing Social Distancing. Floor markings and signage will be provided to encourage that six feet distance is maintained, and we will continue to maximize the use of virtual communications and A/V technology. Employees should follow and promote the [CDC Guidance](#) on hand washing, and should use wipes to clean their work station frequently.

If an employee is not following social distancing and face covering rules, please report your concern to your immediate supervisor.

In addition, per USDA guidance, all occupants are required to wear face coverings when away from their desk. All occupants should maintain social distance in hallways or walkways.

Elevators: There will be social distance reminders placed in the lobby to assist with maintaining the required distance. Wait times will vary in the same manner as employee arrival and departure schedules. Employees should discuss changes to their schedule with their supervisor if they have concerns about wait times on elevators.

FNS Leadership is working closely with the Department for Phase 3 reopening and assessing if additional mitigation strategies will be needed - staff will be updated as more information is available.

CLEANING PROTOCOLS FOR COMMON AREAS

Facility cleaning will be in compliance with the [CDC Guidance](#) and using [EPA approved products](#). Building maintenance/regular cleaning contract or staff cleaning schedules will be posted in common areas and maintenance or cleaning staff will list when cleaning was last completed.

Facility cleaning is conducted in compliance with CDC guidance. Signage has been posted throughout buildings to indicate the cleaning schedule for restrooms, pantries, etc. Please refer to each facility's unique cleaning schedule that will be addressed by your management.

Meeting/Conference Rooms: Occupancy will be limited to allow social distancing. The maximum occupancy of each conference room is posted outside each conference room. Where social distancing is not possible in person, remote tools (Skype, Teams, teleconferences) will be used. Conference rooms will be cleaned 2x daily by the cleaning staff. Wiping down room/furniture/equipment is the responsibility of the meeting attendees at end of meeting.

Break Rooms/Pantries: Occupancy is limited to allow social distancing. The maximum occupancy of each break room/pantry is posted outside of each area break room/pantry. Each pantry will be cleaned 2x daily. In addition, wipes and hand sanitizer are available in all break rooms/pantries. Wiping down handles/coffee machines/microwaves prior to use and before exiting is the responsibility of the employee.

Bathrooms/High Traffic Areas: Throughout all phases until complete reopening occurs, maximum bathroom occupancy as well as the cleaning schedule is posted outside of each bathroom. In addition, hand sanitizer stands have been placed on each side of the elevator lobby near each bathroom. In addition to the posted cleaning schedule, hand sanitizer stations and/or disinfecting wipes will be available throughout buildings near highly trafficked areas such as shared printers/copiers/equipment. Wiping down shared printers/copiers/equipment is the responsibility of the employee.

Cleaning crews will be cleaning common areas, but throughout the day employees should be using wipes after usage as well as cleaning their individual workspaces.

If someone tests positive at the facility, enhanced cleaning protocols will follow CDC guidance.

PROTOCOL FOR COVID-19 SYMPTONS

At this time, the Department will not be performing temperature checks. Employees and contractors should diligently monitor their health, including:

- a) If an employee exhibits COVID-19 related symptoms or is not feeling well, the employee should not be at work onsite until all symptoms subside and the employee is feeling better.
- b) Employees and contractors should consider taking their temperature daily before going to work. If someone has a fever above 100.4 degrees (F) they should stay home and consult a physician for further medical instruction.
- c) If an employee or contractor knows he/she has been in direct contact with a person while that person is infected with COVID-19, the person should self-quarantine for at least 14 days after the last date of exposure and notify their supervisor.

FNS leaders are expected to continue reporting daily their test positive cases, presumptive positive cases, as well as recoveries. This process remains unchanged and will continue until the Department completes all 3 phases and is 100 percent reopened.

USDA recognizes that as employees come back to the office, they will want to be apprised of test positives in the building in which they are located and what the process will look like. The Department is working on what that policy will look like and will update guidance as its available accordingly. At this time, the Department is not providing free COVID-19 tests for employees. There are many testing sites available around the country, and employees should contact their local health care provider or local government to find the testing site nearest to them.

VISITOR CONSIDERATIONS

Visitors will be restricted to mission critical scheduled visits only. Missions, agencies and offices will be using a [Visitor Health and Travel Questionnaire](#).

All visitors are required to wear face coverings. FNS will not provide face coverings to visitors. Visitors must follow the same protocols as employees including wearing a face covering at all times.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION and PARKING

FNS will utilize guidance from local transportation agencies as well as local and state governments. Additional information regarding availability of mass public transportation will be considered in moving to Phase 3 of operations.

MOVING TO THE NEXT PHASE

A facility will progress to the next phase only if the facility operates at least 14 consecutive days between each phase with no new cases of COVID-19 onsite. The community in which the facility is located must also continue to meet all federal gating criteria. A phase may last longer than 14 consecutive days.

HVAC SYSTEMS

Air Flow/Filters: GSA is following the CDC guidance for all GSA-leased buildings. Windows and balcony doors may not be opened at Braddock Place. In general, most HVAC systems in GSA-leased buildings are designed to deliver ventilation air up to a maximum design amount. All systems are maintained by the Lessor and filters are checked/replaced by the according to the building maintenance schedule to make sure they are within the service life and that they are installed properly.

CIVIL RIGHTS

We are committed to protecting the rights of all employees. Safety rules, such as the requirement to wear a face covering and to social distance when in the building, apply to all employees and will be strictly enforced in accordance with Departmental guidance. Employees who are requesting an exemption will need to submit a Reasonable Accommodation request, which will be reviewed on an individual basis. Employees who request or receive a Reasonable Accommodation will not be penalized. We do not tolerate any form of discrimination, retaliation, or harassment of any sort. For additional information concerning civil rights or equal employment opportunity, please contact the [Civil Rights Division](#).