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DEPARTMENT of CHILDREN and FAMILIES

Making a Difference for Children, Families and Communities



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Governor

Re-Entry Frequently Asked Questions

(Version 1, July 13, 2021)

The health and safety of our staff remains a priority. To that end, the Department is going above and beyond what is expected to protect our staff and limit our transmission footprint.

The Department's re-entry plan has evolved over time to comport with guidelines from the US Center for Disease Control, the CT Department of Public Health, and the CT Department of Administrative Services. It has also been shaped by your responses to the Telework Surveys; your questions and the feedback submitted via the COVID mailbox; as well as through your chain of command. Your input is valued!

Below are the answers to frequently asked questions, specific to CT DCF, related to your health & safety, personal protective equipment, teleworking, and more. While we hope you find the information useful, it is also important to note the information is subject to change at any time and will be updated to reflect the current guidance.

HEALTH, SAFETY & PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

What changes were made to improve the air quality?

The ventilation system in all the buildings we occupy meet all the HVAC standards. All the filters have been upgraded to hospital grade and are changed at the frequency recommended by the manufacturer. Logs are maintained and approved by the Department of Administrative Services (DAS). In addition, the fresh air makeup has been increased to the max possible. This may result in colder, or warmer than normal temperatures so it will be important for staff to wear layers.

Will the Department supply us with PPE including wipes, hand sanitizer and sanitizing solution? Will wipes will be maintained near the copiers and small appliances?

Yes. Throughout the pandemic, the Department has maintained a healthy stockpile of PPE including masks (surgical and KN95), face shields, hand sanitizer, sanitation wipes, cleaning/sanitation solution, paper towels, etc. The Department will continue to provide staff with these on an ongoing basis. Hand sanitizer, sanitation wipes or cleaning/sanitation solution and paper towels will be kept near the copy and fax machines as well as the printers. In addition to soap and water, these will also be available in designated areas where small appliances and refrigerators remain in use.

How often will the office be cleaned?

Daily cleaning schedules and targeted disinfection of common touchpoints and heavily utilized spaces, including the bathroom, will be maintained in compliance with CDC Guidelines.

What type of masks are required to be worn in the building?

Until further notice, **DCF staff are required to wear a surgical mask, a KN95 or N95 when in the building**, unless they have an ADA accommodation to wear a face shield. (See DCF Mask Guidance Memo link below)

Visitors must wear a mask that covers their mouth and nose.

Visitors **refusing** to wear a mask will not be allowed in the building.

Visitors **unable to wear compliant face coverings due to a medical condition** will be serviced in the lobby or other area where they can be isolated with appropriate distancing from other individuals.

DCF Mask Guidance Memo - <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DCF/Agency/COVID-Emails/DCF-Mask-Guidance.pdf>

Will we be required to wear masks indoors?

Yes, all persons entering the building must wear a face mask and must practice social distancing. *This includes fully vaccinated individuals.*

Masks are still required in common areas. DPH guidance recommends that all employees continue the practice of wearing a mask in hallways, conference rooms, elevators, and other common areas. This requirement applies to everyone, regardless of vaccination status. (See link below for OPM & DAS Guidance dated June 11, 2021)

A mask is not needed if you are alone in a personal office, however, a mask shall be worn if there is more than one person in the office and staff are not able to maintain six feet distance. A mask shall be worn if there is more than one person in a conference room and staff are not able to maintain six feet distance.

Office of Policy & Management/Dept of Administrative Services Guidance - <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Coronavirus/20210611-COVID19-Guidance-regarding-absences-requests-for-telework-and-or-changes-in-work-schedules.pdf>

Do I have to wear a mask when I am out in the field and visiting with clients?

Yes, surgical masks are required when interacting with clients or providers in other indoor spaces outside of DCF office buildings, as children under the age of 12 are not yet eligible for the.

Can I wear a face shield instead of a mask?

Unless approved for an ADA accommodation, face shields are not be worn instead of a mask. The CDC does not recommend using face shields or goggles as a substitute for masks. Goggles or other eye protection may be used in addition to a mask.

Face shields and goggles are primarily used to protect the eyes of the person wearing it. Goggles do not cover the nose and mouth. Face shields are not as effective at protecting you or the people around you from respiratory droplets. Face shields have large gaps

below and alongside the face, where your respiratory droplets may escape and reach others around you and will not protect you from respiratory droplets from others.

Can I wear two masks instead of wearing a mask and face shield?

A mask **and** a face shield should be used when interacting with an individual who is **symptomatic** or positive for COVID during the contagious period (*up to 10 days after diagnosis*).

To protect one of our most vulnerable population, when interacting with children who are less than 2 years old, who cannot wear a mask or receive the COVID vaccine, staff should wear a surgical mask and face shield. If staff is unable to wear a face shield, then staff should double up on masks and wear two (2) surgical masks or a cloth mask over a surgical mask. **Staff should not double up on masks if they are wearing an N95.**

How do I address a staff person who is not wearing a mask in the building?

Given the fact that there are medical reasons as to why staff may not be wearing a mask, concerns about mask non-compliant behavior should be reported to your chain of command. Please do not address staff directly. Managers will receive further guidance on whether notification to HR is necessary and/or appropriate.

Are parents and children required to wear a mask during supervised visits when the visits take place outdoors?

Families and children shall wear a mask when 6 feet distance cannot be maintained by all parties during a visit.

Are parents and children required to wear a mask during supervised visits when the visits take place outside of our offices, for example, the library, the mall, or an indoor public place that does not require mask wearing?

Families and children shall wear a mask when 6 feet distance cannot be maintained and when visits consists of individuals from different households.

Can parents/guardians/caretakers bring food and drinks to supervised visits?

Yes, but all parties must maintain 6 feet distance from one another when eating or drinking. At all other times, masks must be worn when the visits are in a DCF building.

What if my workspace is within an open area and other staff sit close by?

Trifolds are available for staff to create barriers between workspaces and cubicles where the walls are less than 30 inches tall.

In workplace settings where employees are working alone in segregated spaces (i.e. cubicles with walls that extend at least 30 inches above the desktop, private offices, etc.), employees may remove their masks. However, workers shall wear a mask or face covering from the time they enter the building until the time they arrive at their cubicle/workstation and at any time they are leaving their workstation and moving around common areas.

According to the Center for Disease Control, those at greatest risk of infection are persons who have had prolonged, unprotected close contact (i.e., within 6 feet for 15 minutes or

longer) with a patient with confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection, regardless of whether the patient has symptoms. All persons can reduce the risk to themselves and others by wearing a mask, practicing physical distancing, washing their hands often, and taking other prevention measures, including getting vaccinated. (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/faq.html>)

Will others be allowed to sit at/use my desk on the days I am teleworking?

In most offices, seating remains assigned and staff are encouraged to use their cubicles/offices to work at when they are in the office. In places where there are shared workspaces, or when an available cubicle or office will need to be used by other staff, the staff person using the cubicle/office will be responsible for cleaning the space before and after using it. Clorox wipes and/or sanitizing solution and paper towels will be available at all printer/copy/fax locations for staff to use.

If staff need a private place to have a conversation or participate in a video conference call, they could use an available conference room. As with the use of cubicles and offices, staff will be responsible for cleaning the space before and after use.

Can I meet with staff in my office? OR Can two or more people meet in an office?

Yes, a mask shall be worn if there is more than one person in a conference room and staff are not able to maintain six feet distance regardless of vaccination status.

Currently, staff coming into the buildings are signing in with the Guards. Will this practice continue?

No, signing in with the guards is no longer required. We are resuming pre-COVID procedures.

Are staff still required to enter the building through the same entrance?

No. To avoid individuals congregating or not being able to maintain distance, staff will be allowed to use multiple entry points, where we have them available, to enter a building. The temperature scanners will remain at the front entrance of the buildings near security for staff to use on a voluntary basis.

Do we have to continue submitting daily attendance reports?

No, the daily attendance will be monitored using the Kronos reports.

Are we still using the temp scanners?

The Department will continue using the temperature scanners for visitors to the building. Staff are encouraged to use them.

When coming into the office, do staff sign in at the Kronos terminals or can they use their phone, tablet, or computer (this will decrease the number of people by the Kronos terminals)?

- If staff are working in the office, they are encouraged to sign in/out using the Kronos terminals in the building; their state issued computer/tablet/laptop or cell phone; or their personal cell phone once they have arrived at their workstation
- If staff are working from home, they are to sign in/out using their state issued equipment - computer/tablet/laptop or cell phone, or their personal cell phone

- Staff may sign in/out of Kronos using their personal devices so long as they are physically present at their workstation
- Where the employee starts their day determines how their timecard is coded
 - Staff are required to continue to use the ///TCC19///Reg Telecommuting code in Kronos when teleworking
 - Staff are not required to clock out and back in when teleworking and are called in to the office/field

Can outposted staff return to their locations (i.e. police departments, schools, daycares)?

Assuming there is agreement for our staff to return to their assigned locations, they have designated an appropriate space for our staff to work in, and our staff are aware of all the safety protocols in place; it is safe for our staff to return.

Were the building capacity restrictions removed?

Yes. There are no longer any building occupancy restrictions. However, it is recommended the capacity in the conference rooms be maintained as noted to ensure social distancing. The conference rooms could be used when privacy is needed or for confidentiality reasons.

Do we still have to adhere to the maximum allowable number of people per elevator?

No, however masks are required. There are no longer any building occupancy restrictions. Elevators are considered common areas.

Can we eat in the kitchen(s) in the offices?

Yes. The kitchen areas in the offices are open and could be used for food preparation. Hand sanitizer and cleaning/disinfecting solution/wipes will be available for staff to sanitize small appliances before and after they are used. Tables should be spaced at least six feet apart and **only one person can sit at a table at a time** to eat their meal. **There should be no congregating in the kitchens.**

Will the cafeterias reopen in buildings that have them?

The reopening of cafeterias will be dependent on who runs/operates the building the offices are in. The cafeteria in Central Office remains closed.

Can staff carpool?

Yes. Masks shall be worn at all times, regardless of vaccine status, in all vehicles when transporting youth or families and when traveling with co-workers. All passengers in a vehicle over the age of two will be required to wear a mask. State employees will be required to wear a surgical mask.

Can meetings continue to be held virtually?

While all contact with children and families has reverted to in person, the use of technology to facilitate virtual meetings is recommended. Because the desktop computers may not be equipped with the tools necessary for staff to participate in virtual meetings, the State issued tablets, laptops, or cell phones are to be used for this purpose. If you are in the office, the use of headphones is strongly encouraged to keep the noise at a minimum. Conference rooms could be used to maintain confidentiality or when privacy is needed.

Are there any protocols in place to screen families before in person visits are made?

Yes, the "*In-Person Visitation: How to Minimize Risk*" presentation dated June 24, 2020 provided guidance on measures to take PRIOR to visits and DURING visits in order to help protect all participants. (See link below)

All participants should be asked this set of questions on the day of but PRIOR to the actual visit. If the answer to any of this set of questions is "Yes", the participant should not attend the visit.

1. Have you in the last 14 days experienced any of the following symptoms?
 - a. Fever over 100.4 or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea/vomiting or diarrhea
2. In the last 14 days have you had any close contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19? (for instance, someone you share a household with or provide hands on care to)
3. In the last 14 days have you travelled out of the state of Connecticut?

In-Person Visitation: How to Minimize Risk - <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DCF/Agency/COVID-Emails/Visitation-Minimizing-Risk-Final.pdf>

Can providers resume supervising visits in our offices?

Yes. It will be important for providers to be aware of and adhere to the mask wearing requirements while in a state building and that arrangements be made for the rooms to be cleaned and disinfected after use.

Are providers that facilitate supervised visits back at full capacity?

Supervised Visitation was never closed. As always, this service is need based. Pandemic safety factors resulted in fewer in-person visitation opportunities but credentialed Supervised Visitation providers were still utilized when determined appropriate. Now that the Department has transitioned to full in-person service provision, it is anticipated that the volume of requests for Supervised Visitation by credentialed providers will rise as well.

Will the Department continue to facilitate contact tracing for staff who test positive for COVID?

Yes, the Department will continue to facilitate contact tracing when staff test positive for COVID. The process allows us to determine when the staff was contagious, identify close contacts, and any impact to the office or the state vehicles.

If an individual is identified through contact tracing as having had confirmed contact with a COVID positive case, the individual may opt out of testing protocols if - 1) the individual is fully vaccinated and provides proof thereof; and 2) the individual remains asymptomatic.

How will the office handle if someone within the office tests positive for COVID?

The Department will continue facilitating contact tracing when staff test positive for COVID. Staff who are experiencing COVID like symptoms, or receive a COVID positive test result, are to report this immediately to their supervisor and the Agency Labor Relations Specialist assigned to their office. The Agency Labor Relations Specialist will call the worker to obtain information that will be used to facilitate contact tracing. The process allows us to determine when the staff was contagious, identify close contacts, and any impact to the office or the state vehicles.

If someone tests positive for COVID, will the entire office be closed to be sanitized, or just the area the person occupied?

The contact tracing process will determine the impact to the office and/or state vehicle and what steps need to be taken to ensure the office and/or state vehicle the COVID positive staff used are clean and sanitized.

Is mandatory testing for facility staff still required?

Employees currently engaged in routine mandatory testing may opt out of testing if they can provide evidence that they have been fully vaccinated. Fully vaccinated refers to a person who is two weeks or more following receipt of the second dose in a 2-dose series, or two weeks or more following receipt of one dose of a single-dose vaccine.

Can I obtain verbal consent for a release of information from a parent/guardian?

During the pandemic, there was latitude under the Commissioner's executive order to get verbal consent in lieu of written signatures for consents and Releases of Information (ROI). That executive order has since expired, and moving forward, staff must get a signature for a medical consent or a ROI - a verbal consent, either over the phone or in person, does not suffice. Staff may get signatures either on a hard copy form or on an electronic version of the form that is loaded on their tablet, but we need a written signature either way.

HUMAN RESOURCES/LABOR RELATIONS

Where does an employee who is claiming a medical exemption to using a face covering request approval from?

If the employee's position requires them to physically report to the worksite to perform their essential functions, the employee should be directed to contact their agency Human Resources unit to engage in the ADA accommodation process, which may include providing medical documentation if necessary.

Will COVID leave be available for staff?

Until further notice, paid leave under 5-248(a) remains available to employees, if not previously exhausted.

Are there any travel restrictions for staff?

There are currently no restrictions for return to work following travel. Please refer to the following link: <https://portal.ct.gov/coronavirus/travel>.