

Paid COVID-19 Leave in Certain Situations

The Montana University System will provide a new “Paid COVID-19 Leave” for up to 30 calendar days, subject to certain eligibility requirements and in coordination with regular statutory sick-leave requirements for state government employees. Your campus and system Human Resources officers are implementing plans to administer this special leave in accordance with state guidelines. This leave program will be managed consistently with steps taken in other agencies, departments and branches of state government.

As the State of Montana prepares for potential impacts of coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, Montana University System employees are encouraged to review the following information, including the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

Questions or concerns should be discussed with your supervisor in consultation with your campus human resources staff.

This guidance is provided given the circumstances relating to the coronavirus (COVID-19) and is not applicable to any past events and does not create an expectation that these guidelines will continue beyond the COVID-19 situation.

This guidance will be updated as this situation continues to evolve. Your supervisor will keep you informed as we move forward. Our priority is the health and safety of our employees and continuity of the critical services we provide.

Overview

Generally, the Paid COVID-19 Leave will assist in situations where individuals are told by public health officials or health care providers to quarantine because of potential exposure or in situations if employees are diagnosed with COVID-19. The employees whose job duties and responsibilities do not allow a work-from-home arrangement may be eligible to use Paid COVID-19 Leave for the time periods specified below for medical needs or reasons of illness that sick leave would normally cover before having to use accrued sick leave.

- **An employee who is quarantined because of potential exposure to COVID-19 and is unable to work remotely is eligible for 14 calendar days of Paid COVID-19 Leave.** Under these circumstances, the employee does not need provider documentation to take the leave, but the employee will be required to provide a letter from the employee’s health care provider or local health department indicating that the employee has completed the required monitoring, isolation, or quarantine period. The employee may also be required to provide medical documentation releasing the employee to full duty prior to returning to work.
- **An employee who is unable to work remotely is eligible for up to 14 calendar days of Paid COVID-19 Leave if the employee or a member of the employee’s household is experiencing a compromised immune system.** The employee may provide a letter from a healthcare

provider indicating the requirement to be away from the workplace to reduce possible exposure to COVID-19 because of the employee's or household member's compromised immune system.

- **An employee who misses work to care for an immediate family member who is quarantined as a result of COVID-19 may be eligible for up to 14 calendar days of Paid COVID-19 Leave; remote work may be an option for the employee if it is available.** The employee does not need provider documentation to take the leave, but the employee will be required to provide a letter from the employee's healthcare provider or local health department indicating that the employee's immediate family member has completed the required monitoring, isolation, or quarantine period prior to returning to work.
- **An employee who is diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus is eligible for up to a maximum of 30 calendar days of Paid COVID-19 Leave. This maximum 30-calendar-day period includes any calendar days absent while under quarantine for COVID-19. Remote work may be an option for the employee if it is available.** The employee will be required to provide written documentation from the employee's health care provider or a public health official of the requirement to be absent from work. The employee will also be required to provide a letter from the employee's healthcare provider or local health department indicating that the employee has completed the required monitoring, isolation, or quarantine period as well as provide medical documentation releasing the employee to full duty prior to returning to work. If the employee is absent from work for more than 30 calendar days, the employee can use accrued sick leave, annual leave, or compensatory time or be in an unpaid leave status.

Paid COVID-19 Leave is only available for the employee's actual worked hours as scheduled by the employee's immediate supervisor. Paid COVID-19 Leave is not provided during weekend or workdays when the employee is not scheduled to work, and no work has been performed.

During the COVID-19 situation, the 90-day sick leave and 6-month annual leave waiting periods for new-hire employees are waived.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is coronavirus (COVID-19)?

A novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified. The virus causing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is not the same as the coronaviruses that commonly circulate among humans and cause mild illness, like the common cold.

2. I am worried about being exposed to COVID-19 at work. How can I reduce my risk?

Employees are always encouraged to use general precautions (at work, in public, or at home). Precautions include:

- Wash your hands with warm soapy water for at least 20 seconds each time.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

- Avoid close contact with people who are ill.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Refrain from reusing tissues after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces that are frequently touched (cell phones, desk phones, keyboards, remote controls, countertops, refrigerator, door handles, etc.).
- Stay home from work if you are sick.
- Minimize your direct contact with others who may be unwell or who are vulnerable to illness.
- Get your flu vaccine if you have not already done so.

3. What if I or a member of my household have a compromised immune system, how can I limit my exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace?

If you or a member of your household are experiencing a compromised immune system and are concerned about possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace, contact your immediate supervisor. You may be required to provide a letter from your health care provider. If possible and appropriate for your work, arrangements may be made for you to be able to work remotely (telework). Your supervisor and you can work together to make necessary arrangements so that you may work remotely.

If you are unable to work remotely because your work does not align with telework, you will be eligible for Paid COVID-19 Leave for up to 14 calendar days. After 14 calendar days, you can use accrued sick leave. You may also use accrued annual leave or compensatory time if you need to remain absent from work due to your personal health condition. If you must remain out from work after exhausting your available leave, you will be placed in an unpaid status until you have been released to return to work by your healthcare provider.

4. What should I do if I think I am sick, but I don't know if I have been exposed to COVID-19?

If you have symptoms of fever and cough or shortness of breath and have not had any known exposure to or tested positive for COVID-19, you should contact your health care provider for further guidance.

5. What should I do if I have been exposed to COVID-19 but do not have symptoms associated with the virus?

If you have reason to believe you have been exposed to the virus, you should contact your health care provider or your local health department. Notify your supervisor that you have taken this step. Employees may be required to remain under quarantine due to exposure to COVID-19 even if they are not symptomatic. If you are told by a health care provider or public health official that you should be under quarantine due to potential exposure, you should not report to work and will be eligible for Paid COVID-19 Leave for up to 14 calendar days. Under these circumstances, you will be required to provide a letter from your health care provider or local health department indicating that you have completed the required monitoring, isolation, or quarantine period. You may also be required to provide medical documentation releasing you to full duty prior to returning to work.

If possible and appropriate for your work, you may also arrange to work remotely (telework). You may work with your supervisor to make necessary arrangements so that you may work remotely.

6. What should I do if I have been exposed to COVID-19 and believe I am developing symptoms associated with the virus?

If you think you are developing symptoms associated with COVID-19 and have reason to believe you have been exposed to the virus, you should contact your health care provider or local health department. Notify your supervisor that you have taken this step. If you are told by a health care provider or public health official that you should be under isolation due to COVID-19 illness, you should not report to work and will be eligible for Paid COVID-19 Leave for up to 30 calendar days. You will be required to provide a letter from your health care provider or local health department indicating that you have completed the required monitoring, isolation, or quarantine period. You may also be required to provide medical documentation releasing you to full duty prior to returning to work.

7. Will my insurance cover the cost of COVID-19 testing?

The Montana University System Health insurance plan will cover COVID-19 testing and will waive co-pays, deductibles, and co-insurance for plan members when services are received from participating providers.

8. I am concerned about exposure from a coworker who seems sick. Can I insist that they be sent home?

If you have a concern about an employee who appears to be sick, speak to your supervisor. Montana University System campus management, in consultation with the campus human resources office, will make appropriate decisions regarding whether the employee will report to work.

9. Will I be notified if someone I work with is confirmed to have COVID-19?

Employees known to be exposed to an individual diagnosed with COVID-19 will be notified that a case has been confirmed, but the Americans with Disabilities Act protects the identity and medical information of people with communicable diseases.

10. Should I cancel planned business travel?

The Montana University System has restricted all non-essential, out-of-state domestic travel. Any campus-affiliated out-of-state travel must be approved by a supervisor. The MUS also urges campuses to minimize in-state travel whenever possible.

11. What will happen if I have personal travel plans?

You should discuss your personal travel plans with your supervisor. If you can postpone your personal travel plans to avoid exposure to COVID-19, that may be in your best interest as well as your coworkers' best interests. If you do travel, plan to contact your supervisor prior to returning to your workplace. Based on the situation in your workplace, you may be

required to work remotely for up to 14 calendar days. If you are unable to work remotely and it is your supervisor's decision to have you remain away from the work environment for 14 calendar days, you will be eligible for Paid COVID-19 Leave.

12. What additional precautions can a Montana University System campus take for employees dealing with the public?

Montana University System campuses may consider the following precautions:

- Restrict how close the public may come to employees.
- Educate employees to wash hands often and use alcohol-based hand sanitizer frequently.
- Institute hygiene rules for meetings, e.g., no handshakes.
- Maintain separate pens and other equipment for the public.

13. What options are available for Montana University System employees who may need to be absent from work as a result of illness from or exposure to COVID-19?

Telecommuting

The option to work from home (telecommute) for employees who need to be absent from work due to COVID-19 may depend on several factors including, but not limited to: job function, essential status, operational requirements of the campus, and ability to access required technology. You should seek approval from your supervisor if this is an option for you.

Leave Options

The Montana University System may provide up to 30 calendar days of Paid COVID-19 Leave for employees who are diagnosed with COVID-19. The maximum 30-calendar-day period includes any calendar days absent while under quarantine for COVID-19. You will be required to provide written documentation from your health care provider or a public health official of the requirement to be absent from work. You will also be required to provide a letter from your healthcare provider or local health department indicating that you have completed the required monitoring, isolation, or quarantine period as well as provide medical documentation releasing you to full duty prior to returning to work.

14. Am I entitled to use Family and Medical Leave (FMLA) for COVID-19?

You may be entitled to use FMLA for absence related to COVID-19 if you have a qualifying event as defined by the Family and Medical Leave Act. Your campus human resources staff can assist you with questions related to FMLA eligibility.

15. What should I do if I have a delayed return from personal travel?

If you have a delayed return from personal travel as a result of any state's or country's monitoring or management of COVID-19 or transportation disruptions associated with such monitoring or management, you should contact your supervisor. Montana University System employees may be eligible to use available accrued leave to cover the absence.

16. What if I need to miss work due to an immediate family member requiring quarantine as a result of COVID-19?

You may be eligible for up to 14 calendar days of Paid COVID-19 Leave to care for a member of your immediate family who is quarantined or is ill as a result of COVID-19. You will be required to provide a letter from your healthcare provider or local health department indicating that your immediate family member has completed the required monitoring, isolation, or quarantine period.

Montana University System employees who need to be absent for more than 14 calendar days for this purpose may use available leave as outlined in the annual, compensatory time, and sick-leave policies.

17. What if I need to miss work due to a school, dependent care, or eldercare facility closure due to a COVID-19 outbreak?

If you need to stay home to care for a child because of a school closure you may be eligible to work remotely (telework). You may work with your supervisor to make necessary arrangements so that you may work remotely.

If you are required to stay home due to closure of a school, childcare, or eldercare facility in connection with the monitoring or management of the coronavirus, or as a result of a declared public health emergency by the Governor and you are not eligible to work remotely or are unable to telework because your child needs full-time care you may take accrued vacation, comp time, or sick leave.

18. Where will notifications or other announcements for Montana University System employees be posted?

Notifications or other campus-specific announcements will be posted on your campus webpage. The Montana University System posts COVID-19 updates and FAQs at: <https://www.mus.edu/>.

For other questions not covered in the Frequently Asked Questions, please contact your campus human resources office.

Adapted from the State of Montana Department of Administration guidance of March 15, 2020.