



# NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

## RETURN TO OFFICE GUIDELINES

**Issue Date: October 15, 2021**

**Updated: January 28, 2022**

**Updated: March 7, 2022**

These guidelines are being issued to assist employees who are returning, or have returned, to DCF worksites. As always, the safety of our employees will continue to be our paramount concern. These guidelines rely on the latest information and recommendations issued by the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Inquiries related to DCF's return to office guidelines and its implementation may be submitted to [DCF.ReturnToOffice@dcf.nj.gov](mailto:DCF.ReturnToOffice@dcf.nj.gov).

### **COVID-19 Symptoms**

The symptoms of COVID-19 can range from mild to severe. Symptoms typically appear 2 – 14 days after exposure to the virus. Per the CDC, the [most common symptoms](#) of COVID-19 are:

- Fever 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 or vomiting
- Diarrhea

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms that are not related to a pre-existing condition, please stay home, and consult with your healthcare provider. If your illness is determined to be COVID-19, please update your supervisor/manager and the **Office of Human Resources (OHR)** accordingly and stay at home until you receive approval from your healthcare provider to return to the workplace or field.

### **Health Screening & Building Entry**

Health and safety messaging will be posted at building entry points advising staff and visitors that by entering a DCF building, they are affirming that they do not have COVID-19 symptoms and that they have not been exposed to someone who is positive for COVID-19 or under a quarantine order.

All staff shall [self-screen](#) prior to reporting to any DCF work location or job assignment and shall not attempt to enter the workplace if they answer “Yes” to any question. Staff with any of the listed COVID-19 symptoms should immediately notify their Supervisor and OHR at [DCFHumRes@dcf.nj.gov](mailto:DCFHumRes@dcf.nj.gov) or call OHR Monday through Friday, between the hours of 8:00 AM and 4:00 PM, at one of the below numbers:

- 609-256-0618
- 609-273-9889
- 609-414-6496
- 609-422-6668
- 609-468-7187
- 609-480-1061
- 609-649-8139

### **Face Masks**

All staff and visitors, **regardless of vaccination status**, will be asked to properly wear cloth or disposable face masks while on the premises, except in instances in which the individual is under two years of age, or at which time it is impracticable for an individual to wear a face mask (e.g., eating, drinking, or during situations when the service provided cannot be performed by an individual wearing a mask).

- All employees may remove their mask when they are eating or drinking, where seated at a workstation and separated from other individuals by at minimum six feet of distance, and when situated in a room alone. All individuals must wear masks during in person meetings, in common areas such as a breakroom, and on elevators when more than one individual is present. Face masks are required during face to face meetings even if social distancing is possible.
- The [PPE Coordinators](#) and the Office of Facilities and Support Services will continue to make face masks, face shields and goggles available to staff upon request.

DCF will deny entry to the worksite to any staff member who declines to wear a face mask, except when doing so would violate state or federal law. DCF is permitted to require employees to produce medical documentation supporting claims that they are unable to wear a face mask

because of a disability. Consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”) and/or New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (“NJLAD”), DCF will work to determine if a reasonable accommodation can be provided to the staff member. Please contact the Office of Human Resources’ ADA office at [DCF.ADA@dcf.nj.gov](mailto:DCF.ADA@dcf.nj.gov) for additional information.

DCF will deny entry to any visitor or contractor who declines to wear a face mask, except when doing so would violate state or federal law. DCF may be required to provide a visitor who declines to wear a mask due to a disability a reasonable accommodation pursuant to the ADA and/or NJLAD, unless doing so would pose an undue hardship to DCF’s operations. Please contact the DCF Office of Legal Affairs at (609) 888-7222 for additional information.

Every employee shares a personal responsibility to ensure not only their safety, but the safety of their co-workers, by following masking guidelines. Staff who fail to comply with masking requirements will be subject to disciplinary action.

### **Hours of Work**

To assist with the flow of staff in and out of the building, DCF will continue to operate under expanded core business hours, Monday through Friday 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM, with the exception of staff in 24-hour operations, OFSS operations and the Office of Education. Managers should work with their teams to implement staggered start times, which could help ease potential crowding in the buildings’ elevators and lobbies.

### **Social Distancing in the Workplace**

Every employee should always strive to maintain a distance of at least six feet from others. However, we know that physical distancing may not always be feasible in certain settings once all employees are in the worksite full-time; we ask that staff make their best efforts to maximize distance between individuals wherever possible.

#### **In the Elevator.**

- Elevator occupancy signage has been clearly posted throughout all DCF facilities. Do **NOT** exceed the posted occupancy limit and observe social distancing as you wait for an elevator cab.
- Although not required, employees may want to face away from the other elevator riders.
- Consider taking the stairs when possible.
- A face mask must be worn while in the elevator.

#### **In the Office/Cubicle.**

- Once you arrive to your workspace, you should minimize the time you leave it throughout the workday.
- Limit co-workers coming into your workspace.

**In the Restroom.**

- Signage has been posted to remind employees to socially distance as much as possible and to wash their hands.
- It is imperative that a face mask be properly worn while visiting the restroom and in all common areas.

**In Meeting/Conference Rooms.**

- In-person meetings are permitted as long as social distancing can be maintained. If social distancing is not possible, activities such as case consultations, supervisory meetings and staff meetings should be held via remote technology.
- If an in-person meeting is deemed necessary, attendance must be limited to the number of attendees that always allows for social distancing.
- All employees must properly wear face masks during in-person meetings.

**In Break Rooms and Kitchens.**

- Employees must maintain social distancing and refrain from congregating. Managers may want to create a sign-up sheet to schedule use of break rooms and kitchens.
- Employees are encouraged to eat at their desk or outside, weather permitting.
- Employees may eat in break rooms if social distancing is able to be maintained.

**General Health and Hygiene Practices**

Staff should employ infection prevention strategies to reduce transmission of COVID-19 and other viruses. Staff should:

**Get Vaccinated and Boosted.**

- At this time, all New Jersey residents ages 5 and older are eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine and residents age 12 and older are eligible for the booster 5 months after the second shot of Pfizer or Moderna, or 2 months after the single Johnson & Johnson shot. Appointments are available in every New Jersey city, town and county at local pharmacies or by [searching online](#) for a vaccination location near you.

**Stay home if you are sick!****Wash your hands often.**

- Frequently wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
- Avoid touching the eyes, nose, and mouth, even when you are wearing gloves.

**Avoid close contact.**

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick or appear sick, even inside your home.
- If possible, maintain 6 feet of space between the sick person and other household members.
- Outside of your home, stay at least 6 feet from other people, even when wearing a mask, whenever possible.

**Cover your mouth and nose with a face mask when around others.**

- Properly wear face mask in common spaces including hallways, bathrooms, kitchens, and meeting rooms.
- Continue to keep 6 feet of distance between yourself and others. Face masks are not a substitute for social distancing.
- In certain high-risk situations, an N95 or KN95 respirator may be appropriate (See: [DCF's COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidance](#)).

**Cover coughs and sneezes.**

- Always cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow and do not spit.
- Throw used tissues in the trash.
- Immediately wash your hands afterwards or, if not possible, use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

**Monitor your health.**

- Be alert for [symptoms](#) including cough, fever, shortness of breath or other symptoms of COVID-19.
- Follow NJDCF [Notification Protocols](#) – based on CDC and DOH direction - if symptoms develop.
- If you become ill while in the workplace, immediately notify your supervisor and OHR that you are sick.

**Cleaning**

DCF will continue to provide supplemental cleaning services to clean all high-touch areas, including the interior of state vehicles. Contracted custodial staff have been directed to enhance their routine cleaning efforts and cleanse commonly touched surfaces nightly and throughout the day.

- Employees and visitors to DCF facilities will have access to shared cleaning materials upon request.
- The Treasury Department has created [specialized cleaning protocols](#) in response to COVID-19. They will be initiated, if necessary, when a suspected or laboratory-confirmed

positive case in the workplace has been discovered or an employee or visitor takes sick while on site. The necessary areas of the workspace will be closed and isolated, and emergency cleaning will be performed by an approved vendor in accordance with CDC guidelines.

- **All employees share in the responsibility of cleaning and maintaining their own workspace. If individuals want additional cleaning of spaces, they can access cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment – PPE – through their designated [PPE coordinator](#).**

### **Notification Protocols**

If any DCF staff member has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or directed by a medical professional or government agency to self-isolate or quarantine because there is a suspicion of exposure to COVID-19, the person should refer to the NJDCF [Notification Protocols](#) and immediately contact OHR at [DCFHumRes@dcf.nj.gov](mailto:DCFHumRes@dcf.nj.gov) or call OHR Monday through Friday, between the hours of 8:00 AM and 4:00 PM, at one of the below numbers:

- 609-256-0618
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- 609-480-1061
- 609-649-8139

### **Sick Leaves and Accommodations**

The Civil Service Commission is continuing two types of paid COVID-19 leave; COVID-19 Sick Leave and COVID-19 Employee Leave. In addition, The Civil Service Commission and the Governor's Office have advised that COVID-19 leave time remains available through March 31, 2022. This includes leave time of up to one full workday for purposes of obtaining a COVID-19 vaccine/booster or recovering from the potential effects of vaccination/booster. Please contact [OHR](#) for more information and for authorization of COVID-19 vaccine.

Per the CDC, individuals meet the criteria for discontinuing isolation if their symptoms resolve or are resolving after 5 days following a positive COVID test. As a result, employees will not be approved for more than 5 days of COVID Sick Leave if their symptoms resolve or are resolving after 5 days following a positive test.

In most cases, issues occurring after an employee is no longer positive for COVID should be covered by accumulated leave time. For example, if an individual is fatigued but no longer has COVID, they are not entitled to additional COVID Sick Leave for that timeframe. If individuals otherwise meet the eligibility for COVID Sick leave, they may still use such leave beyond 5 days, depending on their specific circumstance **supported by medical documentation**.

Employees should consult with OHR for information as to the sufficiency and timing of the medical documentation required to demonstrate that they should qualify for additional COVID Sick Leave beyond the 5-day timeframe.

Employees who are unable to return to the office because of a disability, may be entitled to an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”) and/or New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (“NJLAD”). For more information, please contact [DCF.ADA@dcf.nj.gov](mailto:DCF.ADA@dcf.nj.gov).

### **Flexible Remote Work Allowance**

The following remote work exceptions remain in effect:

- An employee who is the primary caretaker of a school-aged child, a child under five years old attending child care, or an adult that attends a congregate care setting, including, but not limited to, adult day care, senior care, or a developmental disability day program impacted by a COVID-19-related isolation, quarantine, or closure, may work remotely for the period of the COVID-19-related isolation, quarantine, or closure if necessary. The employee must submit documentation from the school, child care center, or congregate care setting to be eligible for this limited exception.
- An employee who is eligible for COVID-19 leave described above, but is able to work remotely, may work remotely for the period of time they would otherwise be eligible for COVID-19 leave time so long as they submit the requisite documentation outlined in the temporary rule governing COVID-19 Sick Leave and COVID-19 Family Leave.

In addition, it is appropriate to provide additional flexibility regarding allowable remote work exceptions to ensure that the rollout of phase 3 continues to be smooth and efficient. DCF employees may be permitted to work from home under the following additional circumstances:

- When working on a project or attending a meeting that is offsite, where the travel time in returning to the worksite would result in less than half of the workday being spent at the worksite.

- When taking paid time off for part of a workday, where returning to the worksite would result in less than half of the workday being spent at the worksite.
- Other unique individualized circumstances, as approved by the manager on a case-by-case basis, that do not result in an on-going change to the employee's schedule (e.g., parent-teacher conferences, home repair appointments, etc.).

Please note that the remote work exceptions described above are entirely discretionary. DCF management shall have the discretion, but is not required, to allow the employee to work from home in these instances.

### **Vaccination and Testing**

Currently, all New Jersey residents ages 5 and older are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine and all individuals age 12 and older are eligible for the vaccine and booster. DCF encourages all eligible staff – if you haven't already - to sign up at a vaccine [location](#) to receive one of the available vaccines. The OHR will ask an employee during the initial screening after a possible exposure or when he or she returns from travel if they have been vaccinated to determine if the employee is required to quarantine. OHR's questioning is an acceptable practice pursuant to guidance issued by the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#).

All state employees are now required to upload their proof of vaccination, including boosters, into ServiceNow by February 11. Boosters can be administered 5 months after receiving the second of a two-dose vaccination (Pfizer or Moderna) or 2 months after receiving the J&J vaccine. ServiceNow can be accessed through your [myNewJersey portal](#) or directly at <https://njservices.service-now.com/sp/> using your Firefox or Google Chrome web browser. It is a quick and easy process that will streamline the collection of vaccination data. Thank you for your attention and cooperation.

Any staff that has not submitted proof that they are fully vaccinated are still required to undergo weekly testing. At this time, DCF workers are **strongly encouraged** to get boosted.

COVID-19 vaccines and boosters are safe and highly effective at preventing you from serious illness or hospitalization. They are one of the most important tools to ending the COVID-19 pandemic. We strongly encourage everyone 5 and older to receive a COVID-19 vaccine— and ages 12 and older to receive the vaccine and booster. You will face no out of pocket costs to receive the vaccination. You can use the [State's COVID-19 vaccine finder page](#) find available vaccination appointments at one of the 1,600+ vaccination sites in the state. Pop-up COVID-19 vaccination events, mobile vaccination clinics, and other vaccination events are being held across New Jersey- find an event near you at our [COVID-19 Community Calendar](#). The Vaccine



Call Center is also available from 8 am to 8 pm to help you book an appointment and answer questions about the vaccine. Learn more about vaccination at the NJ COVID-19 Information Hub at: [COVID-19 Vaccine \(nj.gov\)](https://www.nj.gov/health/covid19/vaccine/)

### **Field Work, Transportation and Travel**

The following will be applicable to all DCF staff engaged in field work, including, but not limited to: Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P), Office of Licensing (OOL) and Institutional Abuse Investigation Unit (IAIU) staff. Please keep in mind that we cannot assume that individuals with whom we come into contact are vaccinated. Please take precautions to protect yourself. DCF strongly recommends that all staff continue to properly wear a face mask while engaged in DCF business.

- **Indoor activities, including investigations and visitation, taking place at DCF offices:** All staff and visitors, regardless of vaccination status, are to be masked, practice social distancing and are subject to screening.
- **Indoor investigations and visitation, taking place at locations other than DCF offices:** Staff, regardless of vaccination status, will be required to wear a face mask when visiting clients in their homes, providers in out of home settings, and licensed entities. For visits taking place in other locations, DCF strongly encourages all adults and youth, regardless of vaccination status, to wear face masks and to practice social distancing. Parent/child visits should **not** be cancelled or terminated if any participant is unwilling to wear a mask.
- **Outdoor investigations and visitation:** Vaccinated adults and youth are not required to mask or practice social distancing unless required by the venue. Unvaccinated individuals should be encouraged to wear a mask when social distancing is not an option. Parent/child visits should **not** be cancelled or terminated if any participant is unwilling to wear a mask.
- **Transportation by DCF staff:** All individuals, regardless of vaccination status, must be masked at all times when in a state vehicle. If a client being transported refuses to wear a mask, staff must seek further guidance from their supervisor.
- **Travel:** CP&P staff should be mindful of the [Normalcy and the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard Guidance for Child Welfare Professionals](#) and that children returning from out of state travel may have to quarantine upon their return. Any travel that would impact an in-person child/parent visit must be discussed with the parent prior to the travel occurring. If the parent disagrees with the travel, the office must follow standard operational procedures and conference with the Deputy Attorney General (DAG).

### **Ongoing Training and Information**

DCF will continue to provide up to date information to staff on masking and other protocols in writing and via the Commissioners' weekly all staff calls.

**APPENDIX A**  
**THE PROPER WAY TO PUT ON AND TAKE OFF CLOTH MASKS**  
**AND GLOVES IN THE WORKPLACE**

**CLOTH FACE MASKS**

- How to properly put on your cloth face covering/mask
  - Wash or disinfect your hands.
  - Place it over your nose and mouth and seat it under your chin. **It must always cover your nose and mouth.**
  - Fit it snugly against the sides of your face.
  - Use the ear loops to secure it behind your ears.
  - It should allow you to breathe without restriction.
  - Face shields may be worn in addition to cloth face coverings/masks but not in lieu of them. Employees who work face-to-face with the public may request they be provided with face shields.
  
- **How to properly take off your cloth face covering/mask**
  - Untie the strings behind your head or stretch the ear loops.
  - Handle only by the ear loops or strings.
  - Fold outside corners together.
  - If you're home for the night, throw it in the washer.
  - Wash or disinfect your hands.

View the CDC poster on the proper way to don and doff face coverings by clicking [here](#).

**DISPOSABLE GLOVES**

- **How to properly put on disposable gloves**
  - Wash or disinfect your hands.
  - Put on the gloves as you would any pair of gloves.
  - Keep your hands away from your face and limit touching surfaces.
  
- **How to properly take off disposable gloves**
  - Using a gloved hand, grasp the palm area of the other gloved hand and peel off the first glove.
  - Hold removed glove in gloved hand.
  - Slide fingers of ungloved hand under remaining glove at wrist and peel off second glove over first glove.
  - Discard gloves in a waste container.
  - Wash or disinfect your hands.

View the CDC poster on the proper way to doff gloves by clicking [here](#).