



# NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

## RETURN TO OFFICE GUIDELINES

Issue Date: October 15, 2021

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**

- Security Personnel will be at the main entrance to each building. 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 (609) 480-1061 or 609-649-8139 Monday – Friday, between the hours of 8:00 AM and 4:00 PM.

### **Face Masks**

- All staff and visitors, **regardless of vaccination status**, will be asked to 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).
  - Staff may remove face masks if they are eating or drinking or alone in a room. 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 always having a face covering/mask available to wear. 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 has received permission from the Civil Service Commission to expand its core business hours to 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. If approved, managers should work with their teams to implement staggered start times, which could help ease potential crowding in the buildings’ elevators and lobbies.
- Employees who wish to – and whose roles allow - may apply for a [Flextime](#) schedule. Flextime is an

arrangement that allows certain employees to alter the start and end times of their workday between the hours of 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM Saturday through Friday. Eligible employees should follow the most current Flextime policy and must seek approval to work different hours other than their normal 8:00 to 4:00, 8:30 to 4:30, 9:00 to 5:00 etc. work hours, in accordance with the Flextime policy.

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

Every employee should strive to maintain a distance of at least six feet from others at all times. 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 used while visiting the restroom and in all common areas.

#### **In Meeting/Conference Rooms.**

- In-person meetings are permitted as long as social distancing is able to 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 absolutely necessary, attendance must be limited to the number of attendees that allows for social distancing at all times.
- All employees must 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 as long as 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.**

- At this time, all New Jersey residents ages 12 and older are eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine. DCF encourages all eligible staff to receive one of the available vaccines.
- 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.**

- Wear a disposable or cloth 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 CDC and NJDCF [guidance](#) 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.**

### **DCF Office Locations**

DCF, in partnership with Treasury, has taken numerous actions to enhance the safety of the state's workspaces in anticipation of employees' return to office. The following steps were taken based on recommendations and guidance issued by the CDC, NJDOH, the Environmental Protection Agency, the World Health Organization and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration:

- Increased ventilation by adjusting airflow settings, performing preventative maintenance, and changing filters of the HVAC systems.
- DCF facilities staff have conducted at least one walk through safety inspection of every DCF office location and are addressing issues as they are identified. Follow up walk throughs have been, and will continue to be, conducted as needed.
- Instituted temporary occupancy limits in elevators.
- Created a COVID-19 self-screening questionnaire for all employees.
- Procured cloth face masks to distribute to employees and visitors.
- Installed hand sanitizer dispensers throughout the offices.
- Posted signage throughout all offices reminding employees to take steps to mitigate the spread of the virus (e.g. not to enter if sick, to wear face masks, avoid congregating, wash hands, etc.).
- Directed contract custodial staff to enhance daily cleaning routines to include commonly touched services.
- Established notification and cleaning protocols when there is a suspected or confirmed positive COVID-19 case in the workplace.
- We will continue to develop, revise and implement safety measures as necessary.

### **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 [DCF Notification Protocols](#) and immediately contact OHR at or (609)-480-1061 or 609-649-8139 Monday – Friday, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.

### **Sick Leaves and Accommodations**

On February 3, 2021, the Civil Service Commission approved the emergency adoption of a temporary rule relaxation that provides full time state employees with two new types of paid COVID-19 leave; COVID-19 Sick Leave and COVID-19 Employee Leave. In addition, 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 OHR at [dcfhumres@dcf.nj.gov](mailto:dcfhumres@dcf.nj.gov).

### **Vaccination and Testing**

At this time, all New Jersey residents ages 12 and older are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine. DCF encourages all eligible staff to register 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](#).

DCF staff is required to submit proof of vaccination by October 18, 2021. Any staff that has not submitted proof that they are fully vaccinated by that date will be required to undergo weekly testing. DCF staff that has not already submitted proof of vaccination should submit such proof to [INSERT CONTACT] as soon as possible.

COVID-19 vaccines are safe and highly effective at preventing you from getting sick. They are one of the most important tools to ending the COVID-19 pandemic. We strongly encourage everyone 12 or older to receive a COVID-19 vaccine—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 \(nj.gov\)](#)

### **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 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](#).