

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

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Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Basics

Q: What Guidance are you providing for people in the office?

A: EPA continues to pay close attention to the evolving Coronavirus situation and will follow the guidance of CDC, OPM, and OMB. The [agency will continue to provide these updates](#) through mass mailers, which will be posted on our [intranet page](#).

Q: What is EPA doing to prepare for/stop the spread of COVID-19?

A: We are following [CDC](#) and local health department guidance. EPA is taking the following actions to mitigate any disruption from/stop the spread of COVID-19

- Following CDC guidance to help prevent transmission of the virus.
- Ensuring COOP plans include telework guidance, including for those not currently on a telework agreement.
- Sending email communications to keep employees up to date.

- Recommending that all telework ready employees take home their laptops and chargers daily, so they are ready in the event their office is closed unexpectedly.
- Instructing [janitorial and cleaning crews](#) to focus on frequently touched areas and common areas such as elevator buttons, door handles and bathrooms.

Q: What does it mean to “self-quarantine”?

A: According to CDC, quarantine in general means the separation of a person or group of people reasonably believed to have been *exposed to a communicable disease but not yet symptomatic*, from others who have not been so exposed, to prevent the possible spread of the communicable disease. To self-quarantine, means to separate yourself from others voluntarily, in this case for 14 days, if you believe you have been exposed to COVID-19.

Q: What if I am sick or I live with someone who is sick?

A: Please follow [CDC guidance](#) on steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 if you are sick.

Q: What if I/or someone I live with has been exposed to someone with COVID-19?

A: Individuals who may have come into contact with confirmed cases of COVID-19 should contact their supervisors immediately. In all confirmed, presumed positive and suspected cases, the affected employee may be requested to provide as much information as possible to minimize the impact on other employees. This information should include, at a minimum, all individuals the employee came into contact with for at least the preceding 14 calendar days and the locations in the building where the employee may have been (to the best of the employee’s memory). EPA management will notify offices/individuals of the potential contact as soon as possible. EPA will not normally release the affected employee’s name.

Telework

Q: What does telework-eligible mean?

A: Telework eligible means that the duties of an employee's job allow them to do at least some of their work from an alternate work location. Employees can be telework eligible whether or not they have a current telework agreement in place.

Q: What if my employee is not telework-eligible or there is insufficient portable work to support full-time employment?

A: Employees who are not telework-eligible for all or a portion of their time may be granted weather and safety leave.

Q: What should I do if an employee runs out of portable work while my office is on “unscheduled telework?”

A: If employees do not have sufficient portable work, they must contact their supervisor to receive additional portable work. Supervisors should explore all options to create and assign/reassign work. This work can include:

- EPA required annual mandatory training.
- Other training in FedTalent (8,000 courses available).
- Assisting colleagues with work assignments.
- Records and information management tasks.

Q: Can new employees telework?

A: Yes. Normally, employees are encouraged to get experience in their organization or work unit before requesting telework. However, supervisors or managers are encouraged to grant telework on a situational/episodic and unscheduled basis (e.g., for a management declared weather event, emergency, or other disruption), to the extent appropriate, as new employees become familiar with work requirements. Employees must have an approved telework agreement and complete the mandatory telework training prior to teleworking. Employees and supervisors are encouraged to work with the local [IT Help Desk](#) to ensure the employee is trained on remote connectivity.

Q: Can a supervisor require an employee with an existing agreement, who has recently returned from travel to a COVID-19 high risk location (e.g., Italy, China etc.) to telework for a specified period (e.g., two weeks)?

A: Yes. The Office of Personnel Management recommends employees stay at home for 14 days from the departure date when returning from an area with widespread, ongoing community spread.

Q: Can telework-eligible employees refuse to telework?

A: A telework-eligible employee is expected to telework, unless otherwise prevented (dependent care, electricity outage, etc.). EPA telework-eligible employees will not normally be granted Weather and Safety Leave. Therefore, if a telework-eligible employee refuses to telework, they must request another type of leave, pursuant to their individual needs (annual, sick, LWOP, etc.).

Q: Can EPA require an employee to telework when a COOP event is declared?

A: Yes. The Telework Enhancement Act provides that when an agency is operating under a continuity of operations plan, that plan shall supersede any telework policy. EPA's COOP plans provide:

- "Employees who are not currently teleworking—even employees without telework agreements in place—may be required to telework on an situational/episodic basis during an emergency. Because of the vital role that telework can play in EPA's ability to maintain operations during an emergency, employees and managers are encouraged to become "telework capable" by teleworking regularly."

Q: What do I need to do to be telework ready?

A: Ensure you have an active telework agreement on file with your supervisor.
Take your EPA laptop and mobile device home daily.
At home, confirm you can access EPA's network using [Pulse Secure](#).
If you haven't changed your password recently, change it now.
Learn how to [forward your desk phone](#) to your home or cell.
Consider registering your personal contact information with the [EPA Mass Alert Notification System \(MANS\)](#) to receive critical notifications during events and emergencies.

Additional Telework Resources:

- [Teleworking Tools](#).

- Bookmark [Password Self-Service](#) in case you have password issues.
- Meet and chat with colleagues via [Skype for Business](#).
- If you have an EPA-issued mobile device, learn about [My Mobile Workplace](#).
- For support, contact EISD at 1-866-411-4EPA (4372) option 3 or [your local IT help desk](#).

Q: Should I use my government furnished equipment and messaging accounts when teleworking?

A: Yes. Official agency business should first and foremost be done on official EPA information systems. The Federal Records Act now prohibits the creation or sending of a federal record using a non-EPA electronic messaging account unless the individual creating or sending the record either: (1) copies their EPA email account at the time of initial creation or transmission of the record, or (2) forwards a complete copy of the record to their EPA email account within 20 days of the original creation or transmission of the record. ... EPA strongly discourages the use of personal email or other personal electronic messaging systems, including text messaging on a personal mobile device, for sending or receiving Agency records, but to the extent such use occurs, the individual creating or sending the record from a non-EPA electronic messaging system must copy their EPA email account at the time of transmission or forward that record to their EPA email account within 20 days of creation or sending.

In addition, please remember to ensure that all EPA records are saved to EPA systems, and any paper records are managed and returned to EPA files when you return to the office. For more information or questions, refer to EPA's [National Records Management Program \(NRMP\)](#) or call the records help desk at 202-566-1494 (available M-F from 9AM-5PM EDT) or email records@epa.gov.

Q: How do I obtain a property pass for my government issued laptop?

A: Property passes for laptop can be obtained through your local accountable Area Property Officer or for laptops issued under the EZTech service, property passes are available through eBusiness.

Q: How do I locate my property pass in eBusiness for EZTech registrations?

A: Property passes generated by eBusiness will show they are "Generated through eBusiness" in place of the accountable area officer's signature. Below are the steps:

1. Go to the [ONE EPA Workplace](#)
2. Click on the Financial Tab
3. Scroll down to [eBusiness](#)
4. Open eBusiness and go to the "Reports" drop down menu
5. Select "Reports by User"
6. Select "Registrations"

7. Search on the individuals name and click the “Add” link, then the “Submit” button on the bottom of the page
8. Find the individuals CT registration and open the registration
9. At the top right of the registration page is a link to create the property pass

Q: As a supervisor, how do I organize a Town Hall meeting for large groups using ReservationlessPlus?

A:

- Most Regions and Offices that host Town Hall meetings need to accommodate connections for more than 250 individuals. Offices should use the Operator Assisted ReservationlessPlus Audio Conferencing.
- This service can accommodate audio conferencing for up to 10,000 users and must be scheduled at least 24 hours in advance, more time is preferred, and can be done so by contacting Conferencing Support at 866-411-4372 opt 5, press 1.
- Prior to scheduling, you must have a Reservationless Plus account already established. This can be done by ordering the service through the Working Capital Fund “NA” service. If presentation materials need to be shared, we recommend pairing this service with Adobe Connect Web Conferencing service.
- If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to the conferencing team at 866-411-4372 opt 5, press 1.
- For more information on our Web and Audio conferencing services, our website is:

<https://intranet.epa.gov/otopintr/webconferencing/index.htm> or specifically about Reservationless-Plus Audio Conferencing, our website is:

<https://intranet.epa.gov/otopintr/webconferencing/reservationless-plus.html>

Q. May I telework if I had previously been deemed ineligible due to performance or conduct deficiencies?

A. Yes. On March 13, 2020, OMS [waived telework eligibility](#) criteria in EPA Order 3110.32 and relevant sections of collective bargaining agreements. Employees with most recent ratings of record less than fully successful and employees with documented performance and conduct deficiencies are authorized to telework.

Q. Must I submit a physician-certified statement to request telework for the Covid-19 response?

A. No. EPA has authorized all-personnel unscheduled telework. Also, on March 11, 2020, OMS had previously [waived the requirement](#) to submit a physician-certified statement when submitting requests for medical telework.

SEE Enrollee Telework

Q: Can SEE enrollees telework?

A: In conjunction with the Administrator's Mass Mailer of March 15, 2020, any SEE enrollee with portable work may telework. If the enrollee will be teleworking, the monitor or coordinator should contact the SEE grantee organization(s) and obtain and complete the required telework forms. This should be timely but not necessarily before granting unscheduled telework. Telework approval from the National SEE Program is not required.

Each coordinator should notify Jan Jablonski and Angela Hughes with the names of SEE enrollees teleworking, along with the Cooperative Agreement number and the date telework will start. The National SEE Program will be providing a template to the grantee organizations and the coordinators. Every two weeks the SRO must certify that the telework list is accurate by sending an updated template to Jan Jablonski and Angela Hughes.

Q: If a SEE enrollee's regular work is not portable, can they be given portable work?

A: We expect SEE monitors and coordinators, in consultation with their supervisors, to seek portable work for as many enrollees as possible. For example, there are mandatory training classes in [FedTalent](#) and a variety of webinars and self-paced training classes that can be taken on the EPA [Office 365 Training Sharepoint Site](#). The assignment of portable work may require adjustments to an enrollee's duties and SEE monitors and coordinators should coordinate (via email) with the appropriate grantee organizations to notify the grantee that a SEE enrollee will be performing other/additional duties temporarily.

Monitors and coordinators should be mindful of restrictions on SEE enrollees to ensure they do not perform inherently governmental functions. Monitors should contact the grantee organization to complete the appropriate telework forms for individual enrollees.

Q: What if a SEE enrollee does not have portable work?

A: When the monitor and local agency management has decided that no portable work exists for a SEE enrollee, EPA has determined that providing administrative leave to SEE Enrollees without portable work is allowable. In the absence of portable work, the cost of providing administrative leave is needed to maintain the readiness of the enrollee workforce pending resumption of full Agency operations.

Upon determining that administrative leave is required, the SRO in conjunction with the SEE coordinator, should submit those names, Cooperative Agreement number and start date by email to Jan Jablonski and Angela Hughes. No prior approval by the National SEE Program is needed. The National SEE Program will be providing a template to the grantee organizations and the coordinators. Every two weeks the SRO must certify that the administrative leave lists are accurate by sending an updated template to Jan Jablonski and Angela Hughes. SROs maintain the discretion to make the determination on funding levels for individual agreements.

The Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education (ORISE) Participants Telework Related

Q: Will ORISE participants be able to telework in instances where local public health authorities are encouraging employers to offer unscheduled telework or prohibiting workers from coming to work due to the threat of COVID-19?

A: Yes. Under existing policy “Management of Interagency Agreements with the Department of Energy for the ORISE Research Participant Program” ([IPI-14-01](#)) and its attachments, ORISE participants are prohibited from telework, except in instances where the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), or the local responsible federal officials, issues an operating status permitting unscheduled telework. (see [Attachment 1](#), “Guidance for Management of Participants”, pg. 5). This exception applies to instances where OPM, or local responsible officials, as relayed by designated Agency officials, determine that telework flexibility is an appropriate response to contain the transmission of COVID-19.

Q: What conditions must an ORISE participant meet in order to telework?

A: To be eligible for episodic telework under this guidance, the following conditions apply and must be met prior to engaging in telework:

1. The participant must have portable research activities suitable for telework;
2. The participant’s mentor, or alternate mentor, must be available to provide guidance to the participant;
3. The participant must confer daily, by phone or email, with their mentor, or alternate mentor; and,
4. The participant must sign an ORISE Participant Unscheduled Flexiplace Agreement form, located in Appendix C to [Attachment 1 of IPI-14-01](#). A new form is required each calendar year. The form will be maintained in the Project Officer file.

Work Schedules

Q: I am on a flexible schedule – may I have increased flexibility in my work schedule to account for times during the regular duty day that I cannot telework (for instance, I am caring for my young children)?

A: Yes. On March 16, 2020, OMS [waived several work schedule](#) requirements, which would allow increased work schedule flexibility for employees on flexible schedules.

- Employees on flexible schedules be permitted to work from 5:00 am – 11:30 pm.
- Core hours for all flexible schedules be waived. This will allow employees on flexible schedules to take unpaid breaks during the day, to account for individual needs (such as childcare).
- Employees be permitted to work additional hours in the evening to make up for breaks during the day.
- Employees who require more breaks during their day must keep track of all hours worked (time in/out) and send to supervisor at the supervisor's request.

This is only applicable to employee on flexible schedules (flexitour, gliding, maxiflex, etc.).

Hours worked between 6:00 pm – 6:00 am would be at the employee's election. Therefore, hours worked during these times are not eligible for premium pay.

These changes are not applicable to fixed work schedules (regular/straight 8 hour schedules, 5-4/9 and 4-10 compressed work schedules).

Employees may request to change from a fixed schedule to a flexible schedule, consistent with the applicable policy or collective bargaining agreement for their position.

Q: I am on a fixed schedule (e.g., compressed or straight 8) – may I have increased flexibility in my work schedule, consistent the flexible work schedule authorities?

A. Unfortunately, no. Regulations provide that employees on fixed schedules must work between 6:00am – 6:00pm. Hours worked outside of those times (even if at the employee's election) trigger nighttime differential pay (and/or other premium pay requirements).

Q: I am currently on a fixed work schedule – may I change to a flexible schedule?

A: Yes. Please review the work schedules offered at your location, and request to change to a flexible schedule (e.g., maxiflex, gliding, flexitour, etc.) consistent with your local work schedules program.

Q: Do I have to submit a work schedule change request in PeoplePlus as well?

A: Yes. An employee makes a request to change his/her schedule and submits the request to the immediate supervisor. The system will send an email to the supervisor stating a schedule request is pending review. Once the supervisor reviews and approves the work schedule in PeoplePlus, the timekeeper will receive an email with details of the schedule. The time-keeper must then assign the approved schedule.

Note: Schedule changes involving changes to the type of schedule (full-time, part-time, intermittent, etc.) may require an action be submitted to the servicing Shared Service Center.

Q: Can supervisors require employees who are utilizing flexible work hours to communicate that schedule to their customers/co-workers (e.g. Employee is working 7a-12p and 6p-8p)? Can my supervisor, tell me to send that schedule to my customers/peers so that people know when I can be contacted?

A: Yes, customers, colleagues and management need to know when an employee is working in order to get work done and facilitate work. Especially in circumstances where the employee is using the maximum flexibility allowed to work around dependent care issues.

Q: Some employees are requesting to take longer breaks in the middle of the day (unrelated to COVID-19 matters). Can managers request that employees, even if on flexible work schedules, work a regular schedule and be available during the regular duty day?

A: Yes, the added flexibility to work schedules is in direct response to issues related to COVID-19 (e.g., dependent care issues). Supervisors should and employees should review requests and determine if the request for the adjustment to the work schedule is needed. However, the objective is that employees are normally available during regular business hours, unless they are otherwise prevented from working during those hours.

Q: Can employees still earn credit hours?

A: Yes, employees on a flexible work schedule have the ability to earn credit hours. Employees must still request and obtain approval from their supervisor prior to working credit hours.

Q. Can supervisors require staff to check in and check out daily?

A: Yes, given the large amounts of TWUSH being utilized along with the waiver of core hours allowing employees maximum flexibility to deal with COVID-19 related issues; it is prudent to have employees check in and out to facilitate work.

Q: Can an employee request the use of the Leave Bank to care for their child/dependent during the COVID-19 crisis?

A: Leave bank leave is granted to employees that are experiencing a stated, medically supported medical emergency. It is not appropriate to grant leave bank hours to employees that need leave for child/dependent care reasons unless the child or dependent has a stated, medically supported medical emergency and the employee needs the leave to take care of the child/dependent while the child/dependent needs medical care. If there is a legitimate need for leave bank, the employee should follow agency procedures to request leave bank.

Q: Can supervisors authorize telework for volunteers?

A. Yes. Supervisors may approve telework for volunteers. Volunteers who telework must comply with HR Bulletin 19-003B, Acceptance and Use of Unpaid Services and EPA Order 3110.32, Telework and relevant sections of collective bargaining agreements.

Q: When can employees begin to request a change to their work schedule (from fixed to flexible)?

A: Employees may request a change to their work schedule (from fixed to flexible) starting immediately. Employees must obtain advance supervisor approval prior to working a new schedule, including the potential of a mid-pay period work schedule change. In all cases, the full pay period hours over the course of two weeks needs to equate to an employee's regular hours, e.g. 80, 32, etc. depending on full time or part time status. To initiate a work schedule change, employees must discuss with their supervisor and request a flexible schedule in PeoplePlus (note: supervisors must approve, and timekeepers must assign the schedule in PeoplePlus). There may be instances in which retroactive timecards will need to be processed if system changes do not occur in time for pay period time and attendance attestation for pay

purposes. Please work with your local HR teams regarding what flexible schedules are authorized for your location.

Q: Which time reporting code should be used for telework?

A: It depends on the type of telework that is performed. Employees should continue to use the appropriate time reporting code for the following instances of telework: TREGW for regular telework, TWRAC for RA telework, TMREG for medical telework, etc. All other work performed in an unscheduled telework status should be documented as TWUSH.

For example, if an employee has a regular telework day every Monday, then the employee should record the work performed on that day as TREGW, and the work performed while teleworking Tuesday-Thursday should be recorded as TWUSH.

Q: For employees who work in DC, but live outside the local commuting area, can they telework from outside the local commuting area (e.g., employee works in DC on a 4/10, travels home to Los Angeles on Friday and returns to DC on Tuesday morning)?

A: Yes, with supervisor approval and the AWL should be identified in the employee's telework agreement.

Q: Can employees work from another alternative work location other than their home?

A: A. Yes, with supervisor approval and the AWL should be identified in the employee's telework agreement.

Facilities and Occupational Health and Safety

Q: What is EPA doing to ensure cleaning products used to clean our facilities are effective against the coronavirus?

A: EPA is ensuring that all facilities are using proper disinfection techniques and products and have/will have hand sanitizing supplies available at entrances and other common areas. Facility managers across the country are working closely with their maintenance staff or GSA to ensure that proper products are being used for cleaning.

Q: What information is being shared with EPA's Safety Health and Environmental Program (SHEMP) managers?

A: Weekly meetings with our Safety and Health Managers nationwide are being used to share best practices and improve situational awareness. SHEMP managers are encouraged to follow guidelines from the Center for Disease Control.

Q: Are guards still required to touch badges at EPA Headquarters?

A: The Federal Protective Service implemented modifications, to badge checks (physical touching of badges) by security guards. Guards are no longer required to touch badges at HQ buildings.

Contractors

Contractor Telework

Q: Can contractor personnel telework?

A: Contractor personnel (on-site or off-site) are not EPA employees and are not subject to EPA telework policies. The telework decision for contractors is governed by:

- their employer's policies;
- the terms and conditions of the contract; and
- made in coordination with the Contracting Officer and EPA program for whom the contractor is performing.

Q: Can contractors under the ORD Student Services Contract (SSC) telework?

A: In short, yes. ORD SSC contractors are not Agency employees and not subject to the Agency's telework policies. However, SSC contractors are considered personal services contractors who should receive day-to-day direction from their mentors and the "mentor should *normally* [emphasis added] be collocated with the student so as to be readily available to the student contractor" (EPA Acquisition Guidance 37.1.3). The Agency's utilization of workplace flexibilities like unscheduled telework in response to the COVID-19 virus are not a *normal* operating circumstance. Therefore, SSC contractors can telework. It is suggested that ORD apply the same guidance to their SSCs as is applicable to the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education students:

1. The participant must have portable research activities suitable for telework;
2. The participant's mentor, or alternate mentor, must be available to provide guidance to the participant; and
3. The participant must confer daily, by phone or email, with their mentor, or alternate mentor.

Travel for Contractor Personnel

Q: How is the travel of contractor personnel impacted?

A: In general, the *decision to request* contractor personnel to travel should be

- based on the needs of the program;

- in compliance with the terms and conditions of the contract, with coordination with the Contracting Officer; and
- done in accordance and in context with any Agency policies and/or operating procedures in effect.

The *decision to allow* individual contractor personnel to travel rests with their employer (the entity under contract with the Agency).

Contractor Performance

Q: If the contractor believes the Coronavirus has caused an inability to perform any task under a contract, how is the performance delay addressed?

A: For delays due to the virus, please contact your cognizant Contracting Officer per the “Excusable Delays” clauses of the contract.

Excusable Delays. Most government contracts will include FAR 52.249-14 or FAR 52.212-4(f), or an equivalent clause, which excuses a contractor’s failure to perform due to causes beyond the control of the contractor, where the Contractor is not at fault or negligence. Examples of causes beyond the Contractor’s control include (1) acts of God or of the public enemy, (2) acts of the Government in either its sovereign or contractual capacity, (3) fires, (4) floods, (5) epidemics, (6) quarantine restrictions, (7) strikes, (8) freight embargoes, and (9) unusually severe weather. If your contract does not include this clause, or you have further questions regarding “excusable delays,” please consult your Contracting Officer to determine how such delays should be handled.

Q: How are subcontracts impacted?

A: Generally, Federal contracts are between the government Agency and the prime contractor. Government Agencies do not have privity of contract with subcontractors. Therefore, primes and subcontractors should review their agreements to determine their obligations to each other.

However, If the failure of the prime contractor to perform is caused by the failure of a [subcontractor](#) at any tier to perform or make progress, **and** if the cause of the failure was beyond the control (see examples above) of **both** the Contractor and [subcontractor](#), **and** without the fault or negligence of either, the Contractor shall not be deemed to be in [default](#), unless –

1. The subcontracted [supplies](#) or services were obtainable from other sources;
2. The Contracting Officer ordered the Contractor in writing to purchase these [supplies](#) or services from the other source; and
3. The Contractor failed to comply reasonably with this order.

If you have further questions regarding “excusable delays,” please consult your Contracting Officer to determine how such delays should be handled.

Contracts Operations

Q: Will contracting operations be impacted if optional telework is enacted in response to the COVID-19 virus?

A: Contracting operations will be fully functional during an optional telework situation. The Agency’s contracting offices (headquarters and regional) are fully capable of performing routine contracting actions remotely.

Travel

Q: What should I do if I have travel plans?

A: You should check with your supervisor. EPA is evaluating all travel at this time. Decisions are based on local public health advisories, as well as State department guidance, and the reason for the travel. Some of the criteria include, is it mission critical, can it be done via VTC, and is it time sensitive.

Q: What should I do if I want to attend a meeting/conference/event in April?

A: Conditions and local public health advisories are being updated frequently, and many events are being postponed. If you would like to attend a meeting/conference/event in April, please speak with your supervisor.