



## Secure Scheduling Ordinance and COVID-19 -- Frequently Asked Questions & Answers UPDATED 3/17/2020

This document provides answers to questions that you may have about Seattle's Secure Scheduling law as it relates to COVID-19. Please visit the [Office of Labor Standards](#) website for more detailed information.

Do you have a question that isn't covered by this Q&A? Visit our [Secure Scheduling Website](#), call 206-256-5297, or reach us electronically:

- Workers with questions and complaints—submit an [online inquiry](#) or send an email to [workers.laborstandards@seattle.gov](mailto:workers.laborstandards@seattle.gov).
- Employers with requests for technical assistance—submit an [online inquiry](#) or send an email to [business.laborstandards@seattle.gov](mailto:business.laborstandards@seattle.gov).

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Seattle's Secure Scheduling ordinance establishes scheduling protections for overtime-eligible employees who work in Seattle at **retail or food service employers with more than 500 employees worldwide**. To be covered, full-service restaurants with 500 must also have 40 or more full-service locations worldwide to be covered. The City of Seattle's Office of Labor Standards administers this ordinance, providing outreach, compliance assistance, and enforcement services to workers and employers.

### **Must an employer pay premium pay to its employees if it cancels shifts for reasons related to COVID-19?**

It depends. In general, if an employer changes an employee's schedule with less than 14 days before the start of the shift, the employer must pay each worker additional compensation unless an exception applies. In the case of COVID-19, the exception for "operations cannot begin or continue" may apply.

### **When does the "operations cannot begin or continue" exception apply?**

An employer is not required to pay additional compensation for a schedule change where the employer cannot open or must close the worksite early due to any of the following reasons:

- i. Threats to employees or property;
- ii. The recommendation of a public official.
- iii. Public utilities fail to supply electricity, water, or gas, or there is a failure in the public utilities, or sewer system;
- iv. Natural disaster;
- v. Weather events; or
- vi. Events that would cause the employer to violate a legal requirement.

### **What is a public official?**

A public official is a government employee that is granted the authority to close a place of business or school. This can include local, state, or federal authorities and public health officials (e.g. Seattle - King County Public Health, the Center for Disease Control, or the State Department of Health) or the superintendent or principal of a public school.

The information provided in this document is not intended as legal advice and should not be used as a substitute for laws and regulations.

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**What is a recommendation that operations not begin or continue?**

There is not a hard and fast definition, but in general the recommendation must be specific to business operations or so closely linked to the nature of the business that it entails a recommendation for the business not to begin operations or to cease operations.

**Updated: Is there currently a recommendation or order from a public official that operations not begin or continue?**

Yes. On March 15, 2020, Governor Inslee issued an order that temporarily prohibits restaurants, bars and entertainment and recreational facilities from opening. Restaurants cannot provide in-room dining service, but may continue to provide delivery and pick-up. Grocery stores and other retail establishments may remain open so long as they can adhere to certain public health guidance, including social distancing and capacity restrictions. The order also restricts gatherings of more than 50 people, and smaller gatherings are prohibited unless the organizers can adhere to certain safety measures.

Other government agencies and officials may also issue recommendations or orders related to business operations during this time. For instance, Seattle- King County Public Health recommendations and orders for businesses and events can be found at the [Public Health Seattle King County website](#) and on this informational sheet [here](#). Recommendations and orders from this agency may change. Please check them frequently.

If a business cannot begin operations or must close in order to comply with these recommendations or to comply with an order, the business is not required to pay premium pay to employees.

**Which businesses are impacted by that recommendation?**

Any business that believes they cannot begin operations or must cease operations in order to comply with current recommendations of public officials.

**Updated: If a restaurant must close under Governor Inslee's March 15, 2020 order for all restaurants to close but chooses to continue to provide takeout and delivery services, do premium pay requirements apply for changes to schedules made with less than 14 days' notice?**

If a restaurant substantially changes its business model such that it is essentially not operating in the way it used to – for example, a restaurant that relies on table service but must switch to only providing takeout and delivery services in order to stay open in light of Governor Inslee's March 15, 2020 order – the “recommendation from a public official that operations not begin or continue” exception may apply. In this scenario, changes to the schedules of covered employees that are reasonably necessary to comply with the order, such as shifts that are cut for the duration of the Governor's order for front-of-house employees because the restaurant is not offering table service, fall within the exception and would not incur premium pay. Changes to the schedules of covered employees that are not reasonably necessary to comply with the order, such as back-of-house employees being asked to stay late to help out with increased delivery business demands, do not fall within the exception and would incur premium pay.

**Updated: Do premium pay requirements still apply to grocery stores?**

Yes. Under Governor Inslee's March 15, 2020 order, as long as grocery stores can adhere to certain public health guidance, including social distancing and capacity restrictions, premium pay requirements still apply. If a business cannot begin operations or must close in order to comply with these recommendations, the business is not required to pay premium pay to employees.

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**What does “operations cannot begin or continue” mean?**

It is impossible or dangerous to open or continue operations.

**What other exceptions might apply in the COVID-19 context?**

If a business does not begin or closes operations due to fears for employees’ safety, the exception for threats to employees or property would apply. For example, if a business learns two hours before closing that an employee has tested positive for COVID-19, and it decides to close and send all employees home early to ensure their safety, this exception will apply.

**Who can I contact if I have more questions about my rights or responsibilities under this law?**

Please call the [Seattle Office of Labor Standards \(OLS\)](http://www.seattle.gov/laborstandards) at [206-256-5297](tel:206-256-5297) or visit our website at <http://www.seattle.gov/laborstandards>. We can answer questions and provide resources!

**Where can I find out more about COVID-19 (formerly called the novel coronavirus) and the steps I can take to prepare?**

Visit the Public Health – Seattle & King County [website](#) for information on COVID-19, which includes an [extensive FAQ](#) and recommendations for preparedness for the general public, schools, workplaces, health care workers and more.

**New!** Visit this webpage to [discover resources for communities impacted by Covid-19](#).