



**Coronavirus Disease 19 (COVID 19)  
Frequently Asked Questions by Employees  
March 2, 2020**

**What is Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-2019)?**

Novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is a new virus strain that can spread from person-to-person. Reported cases range from mild illness (like a common cold) to severe pneumonia that requires hospitalization. Symptoms can include fever, coughing and shortness of breath. View the Public Health – Seattle & King County [backgrounder on COVID-19](#) for more information, which includes an extensive FAQ as well as recommendations for preparedness for the general public, schools, workplaces and health care workers.

**What can be done to prevent the spread of the virus?**

There are steps you can take to minimize your exposure to illness:

- **Stay home while you are sick and avoid close contact with others.**
- Wash hands often and vigorously with soap and water for 20 seconds. If not available, use hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid contact with people who are sick.
- Cover your mouth/nose with a tissue or sleeve when coughing or sneezing.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

**What is the City doing to keep a clean workplace?**

The City has increased the number of hand sanitizer stations in high-traffic City buildings, including Seattle Municipal Tower, City Hall and the Seattle Justice Center. These stations were deployed in early February.

The City and its cleaning contractors will continue routine cleaning. Janitorial staff and contractors have also been instructed to increase the frequency of cleaning commonly touched surfaces, such as elevator buttons and door handles. The City is also placing [hand washing reminders](#) from the CDC in all City-cleaned or contracted buildings.

**What can you do to keep your workplace clean?**

Now more than ever it's crucial to develop and practice good health habits that prevent the spread of germs. Employees are advised to keep their individual workspaces clean. Please consider regular cleaning of your keyboards, phones and individual desks. If you have questions, please contact your supervisor.

For more guidance, and to follow the latest health information, please visit Public Health – Seattle & King County at [www.kingcounty.gov/covid](http://www.kingcounty.gov/covid)

### **Are there confirmed cases in the City of Seattle?**

Yes. The first cases in King County were announced on February 28, 2020. The first Seattle case was announced in Seattle on March 1, 2020.

Public Health - Seattle & King County is the local public health agency leading on the COVID-19 response. Check their [website](#) for regular updates on the number of cases or Department of Health's [website](#) for the number of cases statewide.

### **What does the recent uptick in confirmed cases mean?**

It is critical to note that the recent increase in reported COVID-19 cases does not mean that the infection is spreading at a quicker rate. The uptick in confirmed cases correlates with an increase in COVID-19 testing that can now occur directly through the State of Washington instead of the CDC.

### **How is the City preparing?**

In January, the Mayor asked department directors to begin planning Citywide. We will provide you with updates and guidance as the situation evolves based on guidance from the CDC, Washington Department of Health, and Public Health — Seattle & King County. City employees can visit [seattle.gov/human-resources](http://seattle.gov/human-resources) for regular updates on COVID-19.

In addition, on March 1, Mayor Durkan issued a Mayoral Directive initiating a series of additional actions to address COVID-19. These actions include activating the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Monday through Friday, and appointing Fire Chief Harold Scoggins and Office of Emergency Management (OEM) Acting Director Laurel Nelson to co-chair the Seattle's Emergency Executive Board.

### **How should City employees prepare?**

Know your level of risk to exposure to illness – and how to reduce exposure. Health experts advise that COVID-19 is thought to spread via respiratory droplets (produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes) or between people who are in close contact with one another (within about six feet).

The levels of risk, as it applies to your job at the City, range from Low to Very High. They are:

- **Very High** – Medical staff doing direct patient care with high risk procedures
- **High** – First responders, including Police Officers, Fire Department Personnel, Medics, Navigation Team members
- **Medium** – Those with regular contact with the public, e.g., FAS, HSD, Parks, SPU, SCL employees
- **Lower** – Office workers with limited public contact

Actions to reduce exposure include:

- The City has programs in place such as Job Hazard Analysis, Physical Job Demands Assessment, Respiratory Protection, Skin Protection, as well as safety hazard training, that are appropriate to your level of risk.
- Contacting your team's safety representative or manager if you have any resource needs such as cleaning products, questions about personal protective equipment, or questions about your ability to do your job safely.

Each department is currently developing guidance specific for their teams and functions on actions employees can take to reduce risk of exposure.

### **What should I do if I have flu-like symptoms?**

The CDC recommends that an employee with symptoms be encouraged to stay home and not come to work until they have been free of a temperature higher than 100.4 F, or any other symptoms for at least 24 hours.

### **If I stay home after exhibiting symptoms, do I need to take leave?**

Please contact your supervisor or work area's assigned Human Resources staff to determine your options, which could include sick leave, vacation leave, personal holiday, Alternative Work Agreement (AWA) or other types of leave.

### **Can I work from home?**

The AWA pilot program is still in effect. View the [program guidelines](#) and discuss with your manager what your options might be to work from home. Depending on your function, this will vary from department to department.

### **What should I do if a colleague exhibits symptoms of illness?**

The City is committed to its values of equity and inclusion. We are equally committed to workplace safety. We rely on our City employees to monitor their health and make wise choices to stay home if they feel ill. If you have concerns about the health of your team, please talk to your manager.

### **What should I do if a customer I am serving exhibits symptoms of illness?**

As above, the City is committed to its values of equity and inclusion in serving the public. We are equally committed to workplace safety. If you have concerns, please talk to your manager.

### **Does ancestry determine who is more likely to be affected by COVID-19?**

Ancestry does not make a person more vulnerable to this illness, nor does wearing a face mask mean that someone is ill. You can learn more from Public Health – Seattle & King County [here](#).

### **Should masks be worn?**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does not recommend that masks be worn by people who are well.

The CDC does recommend that masks be worn for people who have virus symptoms. You can continue to find updated guidance from the CDC [here](#).

### **Who can I contact for more information?**

We will provide you with updates as the situation evolves, based on guidance from the CDC, Washington State Department of Health, and Public Health — Seattle & King County.

In addition, each department is currently developing guidance specific for their teams and functions on actions employees can take to reduce risk of exposure.

- For questions about leave, please contact your HR team.
- For questions about workplace safety and sanitation, please contact your team's safety representative.
- We know this can be a stressful time. Remember that the [Employee Assistance Program](#) is always available to you (in person, tele-video or via phone) – including counseling, health, wellness and other resources.
- To learn about Countywide preparations and daily updates, visit the [Public Health – Seattle & King County website](#).
- The Washington State Department of Health has established a call center to address questions from the public. If you have questions about what is happening in Washington state, how the virus is spread, and what to do if you have symptoms, please call 1-800-525-0127.

We hope the resources listed above will be helpful. We will also post a list of HR leaders by department as another point of contact should you seek additional information.