

COVID-19 FAQs for SSA Contractors and Subcontractors with Employees Working at SSA Facilities

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The term “contractor/subcontractor” (herein referred to as “contractor”) as used in this document includes:

- 1) a sole proprietorship where the contractor is the sole employee, and
- 2) employees of contractors and contractor’s subcontractors.

The term “Task Force” as used in this document means the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force as established by Section 4 of Executive Order (EO) 13991 on Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask-Wearing as of January 20, 2021.

These FAQs apply to all contractor employees whose SSA awarded contract statement of work requires them to perform services *on-site* at an SSA-owned or leased facility or other government facility.

Q#1 – Should I use a mask and physically distance while working onsite at SSA locations and offices?

Physical Distancing:

Contractors working onsite at an SSA location/office do not need to physically distance from members of the public or other individuals except where required by Federal, State, local, Tribal, or territorial laws, rules, or regulations.

When COVID-19 Community Levels are MEDIUM or HIGH (see “[Know Your COVID-19 Community Level](#)”), consider avoiding crowding and physically distancing from others in indoor common areas and meeting rooms.

Mask-Wearing:

Contractors will be required to wear a mask when recommended by CDC and [Safer Federal Workforce \(Task Force\)](#) guidance, including in relation to [COVID-19 Community Levels](#), except where prohibited by Federal, State, local, Tribal, or territorial laws, rules, or regulations.

SSA will post signs in its offices and provide information on our websites about the mask-wearing protocols (i.e., required or optional) for those offices based on CDC [COVID-19 Community Levels](#).

When contractors are required to wear a mask, they must follow [Government-wide mask-wearing guidance](#) regarding types of [high-quality](#) masks and respirators; high-quality masks

or respirators include respirators that meet U.S. or international standards (e.g., surgical or procedure style masks) or masks that meet a standard (e.g., ASTM).

Mask-Wearing Is REQUIRED During Any of the Following Situations:

- When COVID-19 Community Level is **HIGH**,
- When **exposed** to COVID-19, or
- When in **Government-Operated Aircraft, Boats, Maritime Conveyances, and Buses**

[*Note:* Regardless of COVID-19 Community Levels, and consistent with CDC guidance, contractors are *required* to wear **high-quality masks or respirators** (such as an surgical or procedure style masks) when in Government-operated buses with multiple occupants, aircraft, boats, and other maritime transportation conveyances].

When **exposed** to COVID-19 (see **Q#6**), or when the COVID-19 Community Level is **HIGH** in a county where a Federal facility is located (pursuant to EO 13991 and consistent with CDC guidance) and services are being performed, contractors shall wear a high-quality mask (e.g., surgical or procedure style masks) while in the facility, regardless of their vaccination status.

When the agency requires contractors to wear a high-quality mask or respirator (e.g., surgical or procedure style masks), we will make those coverings available as follows:

- Contractors who work at buildings within the Woodlawn, Maryland headquarters can obtain surgical or procedure masks from the Employee Health Centers at the Robert M. Ball Building, Meadows East Building, Perimeter East Building, Wabash Complex, and Woodlawn Office Complex.
- Contractors who work outside of the Woodlawn, Maryland headquarters may request surgical or procedure masks from the Contracting Officer Representative (COR).

If a contractor *chooses* to wear **N95 respirators**, they should review Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) [1910.134 Appendix D - \(Mandatory\) Information for Employees Using Respirators When not Required Under Standard](#) (Note: OSHA guidance applies only to **N95s**, not KN95s).

Contractors may not wear a face shield *instead of* a mask, but may wear a face shield *in addition to* a mask. Contractors who request to use a face shield *instead of* a mask for a medical, disability, or religious reason must discuss the request with their employer and through the agency COR (who may consult with the Contracting Officer if necessary).

Exceptions to the Mask-Wearing Policy:

Contractors may be asked to lower their masks briefly for identification purposes in compliance with safety and security requirements.

Contractors should contact their employer and notify the agency COR (who may consult with the Contracting Officer if necessary) if they have a medical or religious reason for not wearing a mask when it is required.

SSA provides limited exceptions to wearing a mask or respirators consistent with CDC guidelines, including, but not limited to, when an individual is alone in an office with floor to ceiling walls and a closed door, or for a limited time when eating or drinking and maintaining distancing from others.

Contractors do not need to wear masks or respirators when outdoors at SSA facilities.

Contractors whose work performance is in Government-operated transportation conveyances can remove their masks or respirators for safety reasons or for brief periods of time while eating, drinking, or taking medication. Mask-wearing in these Government-operated conveyances is not required if there is a single occupant or if the occupants are all co-habitants.

Optional Mask-Wearing When COVID-19 Community Level is LOW or MEDIUM:

When the COVID-19 Community Level is **LOW** or **MEDIUM**, SSA will communicate to contractors through signage that mask-wearing is *optional*. We will not otherwise require that a mask be worn, except where required by Federal, State, Tribal, territorial, or local laws, rules, and regulations. Contractors may choose to wear masks during *optional* status.

When riding in Government-operated vans, cars, trucks, and other motor pool passenger vehicles with multiple occupants, we recommend that contractors wear high-quality masks or respirators (such as surgical or procedure style masks).

Please direct any questions or concerns about masks to the COR (who may consult with the Contracting Officer if necessary).

Q#2 - Does SSA have requirements to prevent the spread of COVID-19 for contractors working onsite at SSA facilities?

All contractors who work onsite in SSA facilities must wear a mask when required by the CDC and Task Force guidance (see **Q#1**) and conduct a health self-screening *before* entering SSA facilities (SSA entrances will include posted screening criteria):

- Do you have any new or worsening [symptoms of COVID-19](#) including:
 - Fever (100.4 degrees or higher) or chills;
 - Cough or sore throat;
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing;
 - Fatigue;
 - Muscle pain or body aches;
 - Headache;

- New loss of taste or smell;
- Congestion or runny nose; or
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea?
- Within the last 10 days, have you:
 - Had moderate or severe COVID-19 illness (shortness of breath or difficulty breathing)?
- Within the last 5 days, have you:
 - Been diagnosed with COVID-19?

Contractors who are unable to pass the self-screening due to chronic medical conditions must immediately notify their employer who will notify the COR (who will consult with SSA's Medical Office as necessary).

All SSA contractors who work onsite in SSA facilities will be provided a test kit for home use in case they develop symptoms of COVID-19. Contractor employees in Headquarters, Wabash, Perimeter East, Meadows East, the Woodlawn Office Complex, the Wilkes-Barre Data Operations Center, the Birmingham center, and the Jamaica program service center may acquire a test kit at the employee health center the next time they report onsite; SSA CORs do not need to distribute test kits in those sites. SSA testing kits should NOT be supplied to contractors for other agencies who work in SSA offices, including guards contracted by FPS, or facilities contractors supplied by GSA.

Failed Self-Screening:

Prior to reporting to the worksite daily, contractor employees must assess their health status using the self-screening criteria above and if any of the criteria above are met, must contact their employer before proceeding to the SSA worksite or entering an SSA facility and should take a COVID-19 test if they have not already done so – contractors should test immediately using the test provided by their employer (or the agency) and report the result to their employer. Depending on the contractors' health status, and test result if applicable, their employer will advise whether they should report to the worksite or follow employer sick leave procedures. Contractors who test negative may report to an SSA facility after the test. If you have probable or confirmed COVID-19 (see **Q#7**).

If a test kit is not immediately available, contractors may obtain testing from a [Community-based Testing Site](#), their medical provider, or another source and must do so the same day as failing self-screening. Contractors shall confer with their employer (who will notify the COR and Contracting Officer) regarding the ability to work offsite or continue working onsite while they await test results. Normally, taking a test and obtaining test results from community-based sites, medical providers, or other sources should take no more than one day. Contractors must return to work immediately after a negative test result but no later than the next working day if test results are delayed or isolate with a positive test result (see **Q#7**). Contractors who encounter issues that impact their ability to schedule and

obtain testing the same day, must discuss next steps with the COR (who may consult with the Contracting Officer as necessary).

Contractor employees who test negative for COVID-19 or who have met the criteria to exit isolation will be provided with a new test kit for self-screening upon their return to the SSA facility.

Q#3 – What if the contractor has recently travel internationally or plans to travel?

CDC no longer requires a quarantine after international travel. The CDC [recommends](#) returning travelers get tested 3-5 days after returning from any international travel. If the contractor chooses to test, they should use testing resources authorized by the FDA for emergency use, of their own choice, at their own expense, and on their own time.

Contractors shall follow all State, local, Tribal, or territorial quarantine requirements and will not return to work at the SSA facility until the quarantine period is over.

Contractors shall review and adhere to [CDC guidelines on travel](#) before, during, and after travel, including the following precautions: carefully assessing travel risk prior to travel; follow recommended mask-wearing guidance; avoiding crowded areas; maintaining physical distance from non-household members; avoiding contact with people who have suspected or confirmed COVID-19; and maintaining good hand hygiene by regularly washing hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

Reminder: Contractors who are working under contract encumbering National Security Positions must report all usual international travel protocols commensurate with their Position Sensitivity Level, consistent with their contract terms and conditions.

Q#4 – Is the contractor required to report to the agency COR and Contracting Officer if a contractor employee is subject to a quarantine rule after returning from domestic locations?

Generally, CDC no longer recommends a quarantine for COVID-19 *exposure*. However, in some cases, the contractor may be prohibited from working onsite at an SSA facility after travel for a period of self-quarantine if that individual's travel situation is subject to a state or local quarantine rule.

Contractors should conduct the daily self-screening (see **Q#2**) prior to reporting to SSA worksites. In addition, contractors should follow their local, State, or Tribal recommendations regarding self-quarantine after domestic travel.

Contractors who perform non-portable work requiring them to work onsite at an SSA facility will need to consult with the COR (who will consult with the Contracting Officer as necessary) if they meet the self-quarantine rule.

Q#5 – Are there any agency restrictions to a contractor employee traveling for official contract-related business?

No. Contractor employees should consult with their COR (who may consult with the Contracting Officer as necessary) regarding any official travel for business. There are no Government-wide restrictions on travel. Contractors must strictly adhere to CDC guidance for [domestic](#) and [international](#) travel before, during, and after official travel. Contractors must also follow all travel restrictions put in place by State, Tribal, local, and territorial governments.

Before traveling for official contract-related business, the contractor must check the destination's COVID-19 Community Level, and if the Level is **HIGH**, you must wear a high-quality mask or respirator (e.g., surgical or procedure style masks) while on-duty and around others indoors at your destination.

In addition, before traveling, the contractor shall:

- Test for current COVID-19 infection with a [viral test](#) as close to the time of departure as possible, but no more than 3 days before travel;
- Prepare to be flexible during travel, as restrictions, policies, and circumstances may change during travel; and
- Adhere to pre-travel instructions and COVID-19 exposure and isolation protocols per questions **Q#5** and **Q#7**.

Testing Before and After Travel:

Consistent with CDC recommendations, contractor employees should consider COVID-19 testing with a viral test *following* travel. When CDC recommends travelers consider testing, discuss with your COR.

SSA will provide test kits for contractors to test for COVID-19 when CDC guidance requires or recommends COVID-19 testing prior to or following travel. If a test kit is not immediately available, contractors should obtain testing from a [Community-based Testing Site](#), their medical provider, or another source.

Exposure to COVID-19, Probable, or Confirmed COVID-19 While on Official Travel:

Contractors should contact their COR if any of the following circumstances occur while in official contract-related travel status:

- Contractors who are exposed to COVID-19, have a probable (i.e., symptoms of COVID-19), or confirmed COVID-19 infection while on official travel must follow post-exposure and [isolation](#) protocols.
- Contractors who are on official travel who are symptomatic, have a probable COVID-19 case, or confirmed COVID-19 case must not travel further even if approved for additional travel (e.g., develop COVID-19 symptoms, have a positive COVID-19 test result before reaching your destination, or before completing your approved travel arrangements), for at least 5 full days after your first day of symptoms, or after your initial positive viral test. SSA will reimburse the contractor all costs associated with travel and lodging expenses (in accordance with Federal Travel Regulations) and the cost of any diagnostic testing. Note: Asymptomatic exposed contractors may continue their official travel with COR approval.

Recurring or Worsening COVID-19 Symptoms:

Should your COVID-19 symptoms recur or worsen prior to your return travel, you must not travel further, including return travel, and you are not permitted to enter an SSA facility as part of your official contract-related duties. You must follow safety protocols restarting at day 0 of [isolation](#). SSA will reimburse the contractor all costs associated with travel and lodging expenses (in accordance with Federal Travel Regulations) and the cost of any diagnostic testing.

Q#6 - If a contractor/subcontractor employee has been exposed to COVID-19, what options are available for contract performance?

[CDC guidance](#) no longer recommends individuals quarantine after exposure to COVID-19 regardless of vaccination status.

Asymptomatic contractors who had a known exposure to someone with COVID-19 and who are required to work onsite at an SSA facility will report to that designated location. Contractors are no longer required to report exposures to SSA.

If you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, you will follow [CDC](#) and State, local, and Tribal guidance.

Regardless of COVID-19 Community Levels, after exposure to COVID-19, contractors must:

- wear a high-quality face mask (such as a surgical or procedure style mask) at all SSA worksites (see **Q#1**) and when in official travel status (see **Q#5**) for 10 full days after exposure to COVID-19. The agency will provide a high-quality mask to contractors who request one through the COR. Day 1 is the first full day after last exposure to COVID-19;
- continue daily self-screening and monitor for [symptoms](#) (see **Q#2**). When working onsite at an SSA facility, you must also take [extra precautions](#) such as avoiding crowding and maintaining physical distance from others when you know you are around people

who are [more likely to get very sick](#) from COVID-19 for 10 full days from the date you were last known to have been exposed. For purposes of calculating the 10 full days, day 0 is the day of their last known exposure to someone with COVID-19, and day 1 is the first full day after their last known exposure;

- if reporting to work at an SSA facility, test for current infection with a COVID-19 test at least 5 full days after last known exposure to COVID-19 (i.e., ideally on day 6). Upon notification to the COR about an exposure, the agency will provide you a COVID-19 test kit authorized by the FDA for emergency use to test yourself or refer you to [Community-based Testing Sites](#) if a test kit is not available. Documentation of your test result is not required. If you are supposed to report to an SSA facility on the day you need to test, you should test before reporting to the SSA facility. You must conduct the daily health screening criteria before reporting onsite for work (see **Q#2**); and
- refrain from travel on public transportation such as airplanes, buses, and trains if you will not be able to wear a high-quality mask or respirator (e.g., surgical or procedure style masks) while on official travel. Note: This requirement does not apply if you are not able to wear a mask due to an approved medical or religious accommodation (approved by your employer).

Post Test Result Protocol:

If a contractor tests negative, consistent with CDC guidance, you must continue to wear a high-quality mask for 10 full days from the date you were last known to have been exposed, report to SSA facilities, and continue daily self-screening.

If a contractor tests positive, or if at any time you develop COVID-19 symptoms, you must follow agency protocols on isolation ([see Q#7](#)).

Q#7 - If a contractor employee has a probable or diagnosed case of COVID-19, what is the isolation protocol?

Contractors should check with their COR to determine which of their employees may work from home. As long as contractor/subcontractor employees are: 1) not needed in the SSA facility; 2) have portable work; and 3) the necessary equipment to perform their duties at an alternate duty station, they may work from home.

If the contractor employees meet the qualifications above but have equipment issues that impede working from home, they should alert their employer who will inform the COR (who will consult with the Contracting Officer as necessary). The contractor employee must report the COVID-19 diagnosis to its employer. A subcontractor employee must report the diagnosis to the contractor, who will notify the COR of the diagnosis at least 24-hours prior to the contractor employee reporting for work at an SSA facility. The contractor employee must refrain from entering an SSA facility until cleared by the agency to do so. [The COR no longer needs to notify SSA's Office of Personnel.]

Contractors who will not be reporting to an SSA facility do not need to report information on a probable or diagnosed case of COVID to SSA because this information has no impact on SSA facilities.

Regardless of your vaccination status, contractors who are diagnosed with COVID-19 may not report to SSA facilities and must report any official contract-related travel for 5 days and isolate from the date symptoms began or from the date of the positive test. Contractors will follow State, local, Tribal, or territorial isolation requirements, if those requirements are longer than 5 days.

- You will end isolation after 5 days if you are fever-free for 24-hours without using fever-reducing medication and your symptoms are improving.
- If after 5 days of isolation your symptoms have not improved, continue isolation through day 10 or until you are fever-free without using fever-reducing medication and your symptoms are improving.
- If you had moderate or severe illness, including shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, continue to isolate through day 10. If you are unsure if you had moderate or severe illness or have a weakened immune system, you should consult your medical provider.

Post-Isolation Precautions:

Once a contractor has returned to an SSA worksite after having tested positive for COVID-19 and isolated consistent with [CDC guidance on isolation](#), they must continue to take precautions while at the SSA worksite and when on official travel for at least 10 full days after their first day of symptoms, or after the date of a positive viral test for asymptomatic employees, including wearing a [high-quality mask or respirator](#) (such as an surgical or procedure style masks) when around others; avoiding eating and drinking around others; avoiding environments such as dining facilities, gyms, or other places where they may need to be unmasked around others; and avoiding being around people who they know are at [high risk for severe disease from COVID-19](#).

Exceptions to Mask-Wearing After Returning from Isolation:

- With two sequential negative tests 48 hours apart, a contractor may remove their mask sooner than day 10. When testing after day 5 (ideally on day 6), a contractor can opt to take a second viral antigen test authorized by the FDA. The two tests must be 48 hours apart (e.g., day 6 and day 8). If either of the test results are positive, the contractor should continue taking antigen tests at least 48 hours apart until they have two sequential negative results. This may mean that the contractor would continue wearing a mask and testing beyond day 10.
- If at any point their COVID-19 symptoms recur or worsen, the contractor must not enter an SSA worksite, restarting at day 0, and follow appropriate protocols (See **Q#2** concerning self-screening for symptoms).

Q#8 – Does a contractor need to report when a contract employee was in an SSA facility while positive with COVID-19?

Yes. The contractor must notify the COR of the incident immediately for appropriate cleaning purposes by the agency.

Q#9 - What should onsite contractors who develop symptoms of a respiratory illness or fever during the workday do?

Onsite contractors who develop symptoms potentially associated with COVID-19 during the workday will immediately notify their employer, promptly leave the worksite, and may not report onsite until they receive permission from their employer. The contractor must immediately notify the COR of the incident. The COR will assess and advise on reporting to the worksite. As with any illness, the contractor employee should call their medical provider, as warranted.