



## DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

*Issued May 15, 2020; Last Revised May 27, 2021*

### **RETURNING EMPLOYEES TO THE WORKPLACE POLICY & PROTOCOL**

#### **BACKGROUND**

The safety of City of Milwaukee employees and the need to minimize the spread of COVID-19 continues to be a top priority. With the evolving nature of the pandemic, the availability of COVID-19 vaccinations and the opportunity for all employees to be fully vaccinated, the City is preparing for the return of employees to the workplace. The City has maintained services throughout the pandemic with a mixture of critical in-person services and other services that were modified for delivery in a remote or virtual fashion. The Department of Employee Relations (DER) is working with the Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) and following guidance from federal and state health authorities to resume in-person operations and return employees safely to the worksite. DER is also working with departments to implement a pilot program for remote work options for eligible employees. As onsite work resumes, it is anticipated that eligible employees may continue to follow some type of remote work schedule.

#### **PURPOSE**

This policy provides direction that aligns with recent guidance from federal, state and local health authorities to return employees to the workplace safely and is subject to change based on the evolving nature of the pandemic. The City's goal is to minimize the risk to employees and the public by implementing current best practice safety recommendations for office space configuration, reformatted service delivery, face coverings, cleaning protocols and personal behavior. The City is planning to bring employees back to workplace starting with front facing employees and those involved with public service job duties returning onsite June 21, 2021. Other employees who are ready to resume onsite work may also return to the workplace on a voluntary basis at that time.

#### **SCOPE**

Departments are expected to follow the policy and protocol guidance outlined below as well as the steps to bring employees back to the workplace and share this information with employees.

Departments that are following different practices or deviating from the protocols should work with the DER directly to ensure they are in compliance with over policy recommendations.

## **RETURN TO WORK PROTOCOLS AND PROCEDURES**

Departments should review and follow the steps outlined below as they plan to return employees to the workplace. It is important to recognize that employees may be anxious about resuming onsite work and departments should ensure that all directions and timelines are followed to give employees as much time as possible to prepare for this change. Departments should also share information about support that is available to employees during this time.

Employees may have questions about their personal safety and what the City is doing to ensure the work environment is safe. Employees may also have ongoing childcare issues. Departments should work with employees and be flexible if an employee's personal circumstances prevent them from returning immediately. In addition, the City's Employee Assistance Coordinator is providing education sessions for employees about returning to the workplace to help deal with feelings of anxiousness and apprehension associated with a significant change. The EAP is also available to meet with departments and divisions and offer sessions tailored to the specific needs of their employees or workgroups.

### **I. Directions for the Return of Employee to the Workplace**

1. Identify employees in your department that are either front facing or have direct public service work responsibilities that require them to be onsite starting June 21<sup>st</sup>.
  - a. Send the communication template to all remote working employees outlining the City's return to work schedule.
    - i. This includes notifying front facing employees that they are scheduled to return to work on June 21<sup>st</sup>.
    - ii. The communication template will be shared with departments as soon as the return to work date is publicly announced.
  - b. Make sure employees are aware of EAP support services and education sessions on returning to the workplace. If departments are scheduling special consultations or education sessions specific to their department, that information should be shared with employees as well.
    - i. All City health and wellness partners are aware of the City's transition and are also available to provide support to employees.
  - c. Inform employees of measures the City is taking to ensure their safe return to the workplace including all COVID-19 policies that are still in place. See Section III for a list of current policies.

2. Determine which non-public facing employees are interested in returning to onsite work on a voluntary basis.
3. Review DER's Alternative Work Arrangements (AWA) Program and Policy, Alternative Work Arrangement Request Form and Alternative Work Arrangement Agreement to determine which employees will be allowed to continue working remotely.
  - a. Review your Department's Remote Work Survey responses to understand the overall remote work preferences of your employees.
  - b. Schedule time with employees to review Remote Work models and determine an appropriate remote work schedule based on the department's business needs, the employee's preference and the scheduling circumstances of each work group or team.
  - c. Each employee must complete an AWA Request Form and AWA Agreement that must be approved by the department.
  - d. Departments must complete this process no later than July 6<sup>th</sup>.

## **II. Safety Considerations and Measures**

### **1. Worksite Safety Considerations**

At this time, departments are not required to complete an updated Workplace Hazard Assessment as they return employees to the worksite. However departments can reach out to Lindor Schmidt [LESCHMI@milwaukee.gov](mailto:LESCHMI@milwaukee.gov) or Angie Ogan [anogan@milwaukee.gov](mailto:anogan@milwaukee.gov) if they have questions specific to their work location and employee safety such as workspace layout and the nature of the services provided to the public or employees and if changes are necessary to ensure compliance with physical distance requirements, protective measures and OSHA/CDC safety measures. Recommendations may include office space reconfigurations, traffic flow control, as well as other items.

### **2. Protective Measure Recommendations**

The safety practices outlined below should be followed by departments and employees as more City offices open to the public and normal service operations resume.

#### **a) Employee Vaccinations**

At this point, the City of Milwaukee is not requiring employees to receive the COVID-19 vaccination; however, the City is strongly encouraging employees to receive the COVID-19 vaccination as soon as possible. See the City's Vaccination Policy for more information: [www.milwaukee.gov/COVID-19VaccinationPolicy](http://www.milwaukee.gov/COVID-19VaccinationPolicy)

#### **b) Department Safety Practices**

- Continue promoting healthy hygiene practices including hand washing, wearing a face covering and following distancing guidelines when appropriate.
- To the best extent possible, maintain social distancing when having group events, gatherings, or meetings indoors.
- When holding meetings consider the following:
  - When holding in person meetings, all employees should wear face coverings
  - All in person meetings should also have a virtual option to include those working remotely or who don't feel comfortable meeting in person
  - Departments should ensure meeting spaces and conference rooms that are equipped to support virtual meetings and contact ITMD if equipment installation is required for specific spaces.
- Control traffic flow where narrow spaces don't allow social distancing
- Display appropriate signage to promote social distancing, hand washing, flow and direction of traffic, as needed. Signs can be ordered through DER: [anogan@milwaukee.gov](mailto:anogan@milwaukee.gov)

**c) Masks or Face Coverings**

Employees and visitors are expected to comply with the City's face covering policy that requires employees and visitors to wear a face covering while in any City building. The City's policy requires employees to wear a mask or other cloth face covering that covers his or her mouth and nose while in the workplace. This includes wearing a mask or face covering from the time employees enter their (indoor) worksite and when leaving their work station and moving around or visiting common areas (i.e. hallways, stairwells, copy room, cafeteria, restrooms or break rooms, etc.).

In workplace settings where employees are working alone in an open or segregated space (i.e. cubicles with walls, private offices, etc.), when no other people are in the same area, employees may remove their masks. However, they should wear their mask when other employees or members of the public enter those spaces.

For employees working in congregate settings or open spaces and another person or people are in the same area (i.e. in cubicles, open communication centers, customer service counters, shared offices, warehouses, or other areas open to other employees or the public, or similar settings), the face covering requirement shall be in effect at all times.

Employees working in outdoor workspaces with other employees are required to wear face coverings at all times: [www.milwaukee.gov/FaceCoveringRequirement](http://www.milwaukee.gov/FaceCoveringRequirement)

**d) Health Screenings/Symptom Monitoring**

Employees are encouraged to monitor for COVID-19 symptoms, including fever, before reporting to work. Employees with an elevated temperature (greater than 100 degrees) or other COVID-19 symptoms should not come to work and follow protocols for notifying their department supervisor. In addition, departments should follow DER's COVID-19 policy and administrative guidelines that outline what to do when an employee calls in with potential COVID-19 symptoms. See Section III for more information regarding DER's COVID-19 policies.

**3. Public Areas, Communal Spaces and Customer Service Areas**

City of Milwaukee buildings with areas open to the public and other communal spaces like the City Hall Rotunda, hallways, elevators, stairwells, restrooms, etc. will be addressed by DPW to update necessary interventions to ensure the safety of additional employees and visitors. If public areas in certain buildings or work sites have not been addressed, departments should contact Thomas Tarkowski, [ttarko@milwaukee.gov](mailto:ttarko@milwaukee.gov) in DPW or their department facilities manager to schedule needed interventions.

Department customer service areas should consider the following practices to safely interact with the public and visitors including:

- Post signs, floor markings and other visual cues to indicate where visitors/customers should stand or wait in line if social distancing cannot be maintained.
- Continue to enhance and reformat service delivery options to provide options to employees and public for both in-person and virtual/online services.

**4. Environmental Interventions**

Departments with unique or specialized cleaning interventions should contact DPW/Thomas Tarkowski, [ttarko@milwaukee.gov](mailto:ttarko@milwaukee.gov) and notify the appropriate personnel that employees will be returning to the workplace and that more frequent cleaning may be needed for certain spaces.

**III. Administrative and Policy Considerations**

**1. Continuation of Remote Work Options**

Departments should follow DER's Alternative Work Arrangement policy. If departments have a mix of employees working remotely and onsite, departments should ensure meeting spaces and conference rooms that are equipped to support virtual meetings.

Departments should contact ITMD to determine what type of equipment installation is required for specific spaces.

## **2. DER COVID-19 Policies/Protocols**

Departments must continue to communicate and adhere to the City's COVID-19 policies and protocols which be found on DER's website: [www.milwaukee.gov/der](http://www.milwaukee.gov/der)

- a) COVID-19 Policy and Administrative Guidelines: Addresses employment and workplace considerations related to the COVID-19 and City policies, practices, and procedures that may be impacted. [www.milwaukee.gov/COVID-19GUIDELINES](http://www.milwaukee.gov/COVID-19GUIDELINES)
- b) Protocol for Responding to a Confirmed Case of COVID-19: Employees returning to the workplace are expected to follow the requirements of the City's policy including staying home when sick, notifying the department when testing positive for COVID-19 or being a "close contact" subject to quarantine requirements. [www.milwaukee.gov/COVID-19NotificationProtocol](http://www.milwaukee.gov/COVID-19NotificationProtocol)
- c) COVID-19 Employee Vaccination Policy: Encourages employees to receive the COVID-19 vaccination as soon as possible based upon the availability of the vaccine. At this point, participation in the City of Milwaukee's vaccine program is voluntary for all employees. [www.milwaukee.gov/COVID-19VaccinationPolicy](http://www.milwaukee.gov/COVID-19VaccinationPolicy)
- d) Employee Face Covering Policy: Requires employees and visitors to City of Milwaukee building to continue to wear a mask or cloth face covering that covers their mouth and nose while they are indoors. [www.milwaukee.gov/FaceCoveringRequirement](http://www.milwaukee.gov/FaceCoveringRequirement)
- e) COVID-19 Testing for Employees: Employees who develop symptoms while at work, should be separated from other employees, sent home and advised of COVID-19 testing options available to them through community sites, local pharmacies or by calling their healthcare provider. [www.city.milwaukee.gov/CoronavirusResources/COVID-19-Testing](http://www.city.milwaukee.gov/CoronavirusResources/COVID-19-Testing)

## **3. Visitors and Customers**

As departments resume contact with the public they should continue to incorporate practices that facilitate online processes even as the number of onsite visitors is

increased. As members of the public are allowed entry to workspaces, departments should consider the following:

- Installing signage for self-screening of symptoms outside their office location or implementation of a protocol that requires visitors to complete a questionnaire attesting to not having a fever or other symptoms of COVID-19. A Department Visitor Statement form is available on DER's website: [www.milwaukee.gov/der](http://www.milwaukee.gov/der)
- Share expectations with visitors prior to their arrival, through information posted online, social media and signs posted at the worksite.
- Ensure that contractors working onsite are aware of City policies and the safety practices outlined in this document and that all protocols are followed.

#### **IV. Employee Communication and Support**

Departments are responsible for communicating departmental protocols to employees regarding actions being taken to prevent COVID-19 exposure. Department protocols must be consistent and follow the City's overall policies as well as safety recommendations specific to the department. Information shared with employees should help them recognize areas or work practices that pose a risk for spreading the virus as well as a process to report situations that may need attention and mitigation.

Departments should ensure that the most current information/signage from the CDC and OSHA is posted at each worksite. Departments can place orders for additional floor and wall signs that promote social distancing, hand washing, traffic direction and visitor symptom screening by contacting Angie Ogan [anogan@milwaukee.gov](mailto:anogan@milwaukee.gov). Departments should designate one or more employees to monitor process improvements and worksite safety changes identified through the City's protocol and site specific Workplace Hazard Assessment to ensure recommendations are implemented. Concerns regarding areas or practices that pose a risk to employees should be directed to [safety1st@milwaukee.gov](mailto:safety1st@milwaukee.gov).