

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Concerning Novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) and its impact on the Workplace

**1. What is COVID-19?**

The Novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) is a new or novel coronavirus, also called SARS-CoV-2. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that may cause illness in animals or humans, including the common cold, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). Presently, there is no specific medical treatment or vaccine at present.

We encourage employees to remain informed about COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) offers a wealth of information. Please visit the CDC's website at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html> and the Maryland Department of Health's website at: <https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/Pages/Novel-coronavirus.aspx>.

**2. What are the symptoms of COVID-19?**

Current symptoms reported for patients with COVID-19 have included mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough, and difficulty breathing.

**3. Where can I find policy guidance on dealing with COVID-19 in the workplace?**

The Pandemic Flu and Other Infectious Diseases Attendance and Leave Policy is posted on the DBM website and may be viewed at the following link:

<https://dbm.maryland.gov/employees/Documents/PandemicFluAttendanceLeavePolicy.pdf>.

**4. The Pandemic Flu and Other Infectious Diseases Attendance and Leave Policy refers to a “flu-like illness.” What does this mean?**

A flu-like illness is a condition under which a person displays some or all of the following symptoms typically associated with the flu: fever, chills, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, headache, tiredness, diarrhea, or vomiting. Fever is usually described as temperature of 100.4° F (38° C) or greater.

**5. On March 9, 2020, the Governor announced that the State was in “Level II”. What does this mean?**

Governor Hogan was referring to Level II of the Pandemic Flu and Other Infectious Diseases Attendance and Leave Policy. The policy has three levels of response:

In Level I, State government operations are normal and normal sick leave certification requirements are in place.

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In Level II, the goal is to minimize the spread of illness, while maintaining State operations. Employees will be encouraged to go home or stay home if they are experiencing flu-like illness. Advanced sick leave will be available for employees who do not have earned leave to take (and contractual employees will be allowed to advance paid time off). Sick leave certification requirements will be relaxed and telework rules will be loosened.

In Level III, all State non-emergency essential functions will halt as State offices will close. On-site health screenings may be used, and employees will be sent home if ill. Premium pay will be instituted for emergency essential employees who will be required to report to work as usual.

#### **6. Will the State shut down because of COVID-19?**

As noted above, if we reach Level III, State offices could be closed to halt the spread of COVID-19. Closures could be local, regional or Statewide.

Effective March 9, 2020, the State moved to Level II under the Pandemic Flu and Other Infectious Diseases Attendance and Leave Policy. This policy may be viewed at: <https://dbm.maryland.gov/employees/Documents/PandemicFluAttendanceLeavePolicy.pdf>.

As with any pandemic event, it is difficult to determine whether it will become necessary to close State offices. Closures will be publicized in the same way that emergency closures due to inclement weather are announced.

#### **7. If an employee is sick while at work, can the employee go home?**

Yes. If an employee has a flu-like illness, the employee is encouraged to use their leave to recover at home.

On March 9, 2020, we entered Level II (flexible operations) of the Pandemic Flu and Other Infectious Diseases Attendance and Leave Policy. While at Level II, an employee who is experiencing flu-like symptoms and does not have paid leave available may request Advanced Sick Leave, or in the case of temporary employees, advanced paid time off (refer to the Advanced Sick Leave Policy issued in March 2020). If an employee is sick, but asymptomatic, or caring for an immediate family member who is ill and wishes to work remotely, agencies are being encouraged to permit telework, if possible.

#### **8. If an employee has a flu-like illness, does the leave have to be approved by the supervisor before the employee can leave the worksite?**

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An employee must notify a supervisor prior to leaving work due to illness. If an employee is requesting a form of leave other than sick leave, supervisors have been encouraged to approve leave liberally in order to prevent the spread of illness in the workplace.

**9. If an employee has had a flu-like illness, when can the employee return to work?**

Employees should remain out of work for five (5) to seven (7) days from the onset of a flu-like illness, and after remaining symptom- and fever-free (without the use of fever reducing medications) for twenty-four (24) hours. During the period that the State is dealing with COVID-19, an employee will not be required to provide medical documentation upon return to work if the absence was due to a flu-like illness.

**10. Can employees who are afraid to come to work because of COVID-19 stay home and use leave?**

Concern about COVID-19 is understandable, but employees are encouraged to be prepared, not panicked. If an employee makes a request to take leave for any reason unrelated to the employee's own illness or that of an immediate family member, supervisory approval is required.

**11. If an employee is coughing, can a supervisor ask if the employee has COVID-19?**

Generally, no, but during a pandemic event, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has issued guidance indicating that an employer may ask an employee who reports feeling ill at work or who calls in sick whether the employee is experiencing flu-like symptoms, such as fever or chills and a cough or sore throat. Employers must maintain all information about employee illness as a confidential medical record in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

**12. Should in-person meetings or group trainings be avoided at this time?**

Yes. When possible, limit working in close proximity. Consider alternatives to in-person large meetings, such as conference calls, WebEx, posting training to The Hub, etc.

**13. If an employee contracts COVID-19 while traveling, would travel insurance or regular health insurance cover those health expenses?**

If someone contracts COVID-19 while traveling, the coverage for health expenses would be determined based on the employee's health insurance or any additional insurance the employee may have purchased. Coverage is subject to plan provisions including medical necessity in the event of an urgent or emergent need.

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**14. What will happen if a State employee is quarantined either in a foreign country or in the U.S.? Who will be responsible for the expenses? What would be the employee's status during this time?**

If an employee is traveling for non-business purposes, all expenses would be the responsibility of the employee. If the employee is unable to work remotely, the employee would need to request leave.

**15. Can employees who are not sick be required to report to work to meet staffing needs?**

Yes.

**16. If employees are teleworking, will they be reimbursed for paper, printer ink and any other supplies used for work purposes?**

Employees who telework may use State property, when available, to accomplish their duties. If supplies are needed, the supervisor and employee should discuss how best to ensure that the employee has the necessary supplies to perform the employee's job duties remotely. Employees also should explore alternate solutions to printing, such as scanning and emailing, when possible.

**17. What should an employee do if a coworker has been traveling abroad and then returns to work?**

Not everyone who travels abroad is infected with COVID-19. Understand that the risk of transmitting COVID-19 between coworkers is low if employees remain more than 6 feet from each other and are not exposed to each for prolonged periods of time. If an employee believes a coworker is exhibiting flu-like symptoms, the employee may report their concerns to the employee's supervisor or HR Office.