

**2019 Novel Coronavirus Guidance**  
**Frequently Asked Questions for State of Idaho Employees**  
Updated: March 6, 2020

**What is novel coronavirus?**

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some of which cause illness in people and some that are found in animals that can spread to humans. The novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 has not been seen in people before, so it is called new (novel). There are other known human coronaviruses that cause mild respiratory illnesses like the common cold, which more frequently occur in fall and winter.

Coronaviruses are thought to spread from person to person, similar to other respiratory viruses such as through coughing, sneezing or talking. They might also be spread by touching a contaminated surface then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

Idaho public health officials are monitoring the situation very closely and working with federal, state, and local partners. They are prepared to respond if someone is sick or has been exposed.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updates its website ([www.cdc.gov/coronavirus](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)) nearly daily with the latest information. The World Health Organization is also a trusted source of information about COVID-19. For information on COVID-19 in Idaho, see Idaho's novel coronavirus page, [coronavirus.idaho.gov](http://coronavirus.idaho.gov).

**Continue your current workplace practices and report to work as usual. Should an employee become ill, they should follow normal call-in procedures.**

**Where can I go for up-to-date information about coronavirus/COVID-19 in Idaho?**

Visit [coronavirus.idaho.gov](http://coronavirus.idaho.gov) for updates, resources, and guidance for Idaho.

**What can I do to protect myself?**

The CDC recommends the following [everyday preventive actions](#) to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with the crook of your elbow or a tissue; then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaner spray or wipe.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after using the restroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. (For information about handwashing, see [CDC's Handwashing website](#). For information specific to healthcare, see [CDC's Hand Hygiene in Healthcare Settings](#).)
- If traveling, follow the [CDC's guidance for travelers](#).

### **I am having flu-like symptoms. What should I do?**

You should stay home when you are sick to help prevent the spread of illness to others.

If you need to seek medical care, call ahead to a healthcare provider if you:

- Have been in an [affected area with apparent community spread](#) within the past 14 days;
- Are concerned you might have been exposed; or
- Have symptoms of fever or cough.

If an employee feels they do not need to be seen in-person by their doctor for an illness or concern, make sure they are aware of **telehealth** as an option. Visit [ogi.idaho.gov](#) to learn more about telehealth benefits. Using telehealth, when appropriate for your particular concern, can reduce your exposure to others, decrease wait times, and provide access to an additional number of healthcare providers.

All state employees enrolled in the state's medical plan have access to telehealth through MD Live, as well as enrolled family members. Visit [ogi.idaho.gov](#) to learn more about your telehealth options.

### **Can I wear a facemask at work to help prevent infection from coronavirus?**

The [CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask](#) to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19.

Per their website, facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of facemasks is also crucial for healthcare workers and people who are taking care of someone in close settings (at home or in a health care facility).

### **Will my agency provide hand sanitizer, tissues, and cleaning supplies for the office?**

Agencies may purchase hand sanitizer, tissues, and other cleaning supplies, such as disinfecting wipes, as needed.

### **What kinds of environmental precautions should employees take for conference rooms and shared equipment?**

Like influenza and the common cold, the CDC states that it may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

The CDC recommends the following [everyday preventive actions](#) to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases which includes cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaner or disinfecting wipes.

**What are my telecommuting options if I would like to work from home?**

Talk with your supervisor about telecommuting options for you. If you are sick, let your work know and stay home. If you or a family member become ill with COVID-19, follow the advice of public health.

DHR will be reviewing additional recommendations regarding telecommuting and administrative leave in the event of prolonged school closures or other disruptions that may result from COVID-19.

**Can I request to work in a position with less interpersonal contact until the concerns with COVID-19 are resolved?**

Generally, no. However, if you are an employee with a qualified FMLA condition, please consult with your human resources representative to explore possible accommodations.

**I went on a vacation and was isolated by public health officials for two weeks after my planned vacation. What should I do?**

Although you are isolated, the expectation is that you contact your agency and notify them of your status and anticipated return to work. In this scenario, you may be able to use sick leave and FMLA, if eligible, or other accrued leave.

**Can I impose a self-isolation on myself after traveling abroad?**

You should discuss your concerns with DHR and your human resources representative, and they will base their recommendations on advice from public health.

**What offices need to be closed due to a COVID-19 outbreak?**

Each state agency has a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) that outlines how to deliver essential services during an emergency. Contact your supervisor for your agency's COOP.

**How do I find out if the office I am assigned to work at is closed?**

Because we provide critical services to all Idaho citizens, we avoid closing offices whenever possible. However, in the rare event that an office is closed, the first place to check is your agency's website and with your supervisor.

**Does my agency have a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)?**

All State of Idaho agencies should have a COOP. Consult with your supervisor to obtain further information on the plan.

### **What if a co-worker is showing signs of illness and is still coming to work?**

At this time, most people in the United States [have little immediate risk of exposure](#) to the virus that causes COVID-19 and the [risk in Idaho is considered low](#). Employees should follow normal call-in procedures and stay home anytime they are sick to help prevent the spread of illness to others.

If you are concerned about a co-worker showing signs of illness and still coming to work, talk to your supervisor or HR representative. Nonetheless, employees need to be cautious to ensure that they are not violating their co-worker's rights, discriminating against them, and/or interfering with their privacy.

### **Will I be covered under worker's compensation if I contract COVID-19 from a co-worker?**

Anytime you believe you have acquired an illness at work, either you or your supervisor should complete and submit the [First Report of Injury](#). The State Insurance Fund will review your claim and determine whether worker's compensation applies.

### **Am I required to help a customer or client who is showing signs of COVID-19 or another communicable disease?**

In some circumstances, employees have a right to refuse to perform their work if they believe it is not safe to do so. Employees should discuss their concerns with their supervisor and/or human resources representative.

Additional information is available through the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration [website](#). Employees with a qualifying disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act may also have additional options available to them.

### **I am scheduled to travel for work. Can I choose not to go due to COVID-19?**

Check with your supervisor to determine if your travel is necessary. In some circumstances, employees have a right to refuse to perform their work if they believe it is not safe to do so. Additional information is available through the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration [website](#).

### **Where can I go for support related to my stress, anxiety, and fears related to the coronavirus?**

The current coronavirus outbreak and constant media coverage can be anxiety-producing. While it is important to stay informed, there are things we can do to manage our mental well-being:

- Avoid speculation and get your information from reputable sources such as the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), the [World Health Organization](#), or the official [Idaho Coronavirus Website](#).
- Manage how you follow the outbreak in the media. If the news is causing you stress or anxiety, reduce your media intake and refer to the reputable information sources listed in the bullet point above.
- Talk about your fears, anxiety, and stress. The [Employee Assistance Program](#) provides confidential, short-term counseling services for benefit eligible employees and their

dependents. Visit <https://ogi.idaho.gov/counseling/> or call 877.427.2327. (TDD: 800.697.0353).

**Are there additional resources?**

The [2-1-1 CareLine](#) is available to field coronavirus questions by dialing 2-1-1 or 1-800-926-2588. The Southwest District Health Department also established a hotline for coronavirus, which can be reached at (208) 455-5411 Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. Mountain Time. Please check your local health districts for their hours.