

Answers to L&I employee questions about the agency's coronavirus (COVID-19) response

Updated 03/23/2021. The newest questions are at the top.

Reopening: How long will most employees be teleworking from home?

The current plan is for most L&I employees to continue teleworking at home until at least July 1. And offices start to reopen, it will be a gradual, phased-in process, starting with a few employees. We're working out details, with a focus on employee safety and customer service.

For many of us, our future work situation is likely to be different than it was in early 2020. Telework is effective for many employees, and many of you have said you'd like at least some continued telework in the future.

To keep a consistent approach, statewide multi-agency discussions about reopening are underway, led by the state Office of Financial Management (OFM). The goal is to align approach and timing for reopening state agencies while respecting the differences in agencies' missions and work. Agencies, including L&I, are sharing information with OFM on service gaps, challenges, successes, and other data around flexible work and customer service.

We'll continue to provide updates as things progress.

Vaccination: Can I use work time to get a COVID-19 vaccination?

If it's during a workday, you can take up to two hours of paid time for travel and vaccination for each dose of the vaccine. There's no reimbursement for mileage or other expenses. If you need more than two hours, you will have to provide additional justification, such as the vaccination location, wait time, etc.

L&I's [COVID-19 immunization leave guidance](#) provides step-by-step instructions on submitting this leave.

Leave: If I get the vaccine and have an adverse reaction, do I use regular sick leave or can I use some of the 80 hours of COVID leave we all got?

Unfortunately, the 80 hours of COVID leave was only available through Dec. 31, 2020. If you feel under the weather for a bit after getting vaccinated, use your regular sick leave.

Eligibility: How can I find out when I qualify for the vaccine?

Use the state's [Vaccine Phase Finder](#). It's quick and easy.

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Vaccine locations: Where can I find a location to get the vaccine, once I qualify?

A good place to start is the state Department of Health’s “[Vaccine Locator](#),” which is frequently updated and can help locate vaccination sites near you with available doses.

Veterans’ vaccines: Are there additional vaccination options available to veterans?

Yes. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is offering vaccines at multiple sites throughout Puget Sound. For specifics, including updates, phone numbers and eligibility information, please see [this recent L&I News article](#).

Previous questions

Telework: I have been teleworking full-time from my home since March 2020 and have seen a substantial increase in my Puget Sound Energy electrical bill. Because I am doing work for L&I and the state from home and that has caused this change, is there any financial relief available to me?

There is currently no reimbursement for any additional utility expenses related to teleworking. If there are any changes, we will let you know as soon as possible.

Vaccines: Will L&I require employees to get the vaccine?

The coronavirus vaccine is not required for L&I employees. We encourage everyone who qualifies to get the vaccine as it becomes available.

Vaccines: What about those of us in high-risk jobs? Can we get the vaccine faster?

We’re working with other agencies to identify and match qualifying positions to the appropriate vaccination phase, based on job duties, location, risk of transmission, and exposure. Since you may qualify for the vaccine faster due to your own life and health factors, we encourage everyone to also use the state’s [Phase Finder app](#), which helps you check your eligibility and sign up to be notified when you become eligible.

Vaccines: What kinds of positions might qualify for earlier vaccination?

Ones in which the work frequently or unavoidably takes people into high-risk locations, like inspecting crowded health care facilities where social distancing is difficult. We’ve also provided these employees with additional training and personal protective equipment.

Vaccines: How would people in those positions be notified?

We’ll send a note with an attached letter you can show to a health care provider, indicating that you qualify for the vaccine based on your work duties. It would be up to you to schedule that appointment and get the vaccine.

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Vaccines: Will L&I get vaccines or host a vaccination event, like the annual flu shots?

Since we're not a health care provider, we do not expect to get vaccine. There are no plans for an in-person vaccination event at L&I facilities.

Winter storms: What happens if we lose power at our home, now that many of us are teleworking?

If you have a power outage at home, do *not* go to the office to continue working. We must maintain physical distancing and limit building occupancy levels. Employees are not required to submit leave if they're unable to access L&I systems or databases due to severe inclement weather, including power outages that may result. Work with your supervisor to coordinate projects and work that you will be able to do during this time. If you have any questions, contact your Human Resources consultant.

Health and safety: Where can I find the Employee Self-Assessment?

Thank you for taking the self-assessment every time you come into an L&I facility or work in the field and raising the link-location here. Here's the [link to the assessment](#), which can always be found near the top of the agency's [coronavirus information page for employees](#).

And here's the most convenient way: [Install the health assessment link on the home screen](#) of your iPhone or Android smart phone. That way you can easily pull out your phone to quickly run through the questions each time before coming into the office or heading into the field.

Remember that it's crucial to stay home if you feel sick, even if it's the sniffles.

Health and safety: Are two-layer gaiters allowed at L&I, now that CDC has updated its recommendations to include two-layer gaiters?

Yes. The L&I mask subgroup has updated the [employee guidance on facial coverings](#) to allow two-layer gaiters to be worn while working at an L&I office or in the field. The group noted that gaiters are also typically form-fitting, with a snug fit against the face.

The change does not allow scarves or bandannas, which are still not acceptable for L&I employees in the office or field, because it's difficult to maintain a snug fit and because of the wide variety in the density of the weave of fabrics.

Health and safety: The CDC announced options for [shortening the 14-day recommended quarantine](#) period to 10 days with no symptoms OR seven days with a negative test. Will L&I adopt these new options?

The CDC maintains the 14 day recommendation, and adds the shorter quarantine periods are acceptable alternatives when there are considerations such as mental health, physical health, or economic hardship. If you have tested positive and have concerns about those factors, talk to

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your Human Resources consultant. The 10-day alternative allows for a transmission risk of 1 percent to 10 percent, according to the CDC. The seven-day alternative carries a transmission risk of 5 percent to 12 percent.

The 14-day recommendation was based on estimates of the upper bounds of the COVID-19 incubation period. Since, according to CDC, “Any option to shorten quarantine risks being less effective than the currently recommended 14-day quarantine,” L&I will continue to ask employees who test positive to self-quarantine for 14 days. Employee safety is a top priority, and sticking with the 14-day standard helps maintain the lowest possible risk of transmission to other L&I employees.

Health and safety: With all the outbreaks in COVID cases at L&I and the uncertainty of entering the building, why doesn't L&I have an entry screening before anyone goes into the building? This is required at most small businesses: They ask seven questions and take the person's temperature.

Early on, we considered a screening program. There were concerns about people bunching up in lines as they waited for screeners to interview and take the temperature of each person, and possibly spreading the virus in that setting. And L&I has employees coming into work at many different times during the day. We also thought about the many entrances and the need to ensure accessibility throughout the building. In discussing it with health care experts, we learned employees could enter with no symptoms and still spread the virus by being asymptomatic.

That's why we built the [health assessment app](#), which is [easy to add to your smartphone's home screen](#). Anyone coming into an L&I building or working in the field is required to ask themselves those questions first, every time.

We've relied on other measures to minimize the risks at L&I. Most of the agency is teleworking, and we've carefully controlled occupancy and distancing for those who do come into an office. We continue to emphasize staying home if you feel sick in virtually every COVID-19 update, along with other proven safety measures, like wearing a mask, frequently washing hands, and maintaining physical distances.

This multilayered approach, in which we all take collective responsibility for each other's health, has worked well. Most cases over the last few months have involved employees who haven't been in the office in weeks or months.

Telework: I normally work at my desk 100 percent of the time, but my position has proven during the pandemic that the work can be done successfully through full-time telework. What if my supervisor does not agree with continued telework after the pandemic ends? I want to telework for more reasons than the pandemic.

As an agency, we have shown that teleworking is viable for many business areas.

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The employee surveys clearly show a desire for some level of telework as we move past the pandemic. For many, a telework option is part of L&I being an employer of choice. Although some jobs require being in an office or in the field all or some of the time, we expect considerable ongoing use of telework. Talk with your supervisor and/or Human Resources consultant and make your request known now, and try to find a solution that works for everyone. In some cases, that solution may be a hybrid approach, with an employee teleworking on some days and not others.

Health and safety: Where can I report businesses violating the Safe Start order?

Here's the [Safe Start online reporting form](#).

Health and safety: What should I do in an office if I need disinfecting wipes, hand sanitizer, or other supplies?

Thanks for remembering our [office pandemic protocols](#). The Facilities Services folks are working with Internal Safety and Health to keep areas supplied. If you run out, inform your safety committee, Internal Safety and Health, or Facilities Services and they'll fix it.

Telework: I'm not considered an essential employee who needs to be in the building, but would still like to continue working in the building for now. Can I continue to come in to the office?

In the name of "Stay Healthy, Stay Home," no. If you are able to telework or work remotely, you are now required to do so.

Health and safety: Can I wear a face shield, rather than a face mask, when working in an L&I building?

Sorry, no. A face shield can help prevent you from touching your face and perhaps from some sprayed droplets, like someone sneezing close to you. They [do little to contain the respiratory droplets that you exhale](#) when you breathe or talk. The main benefit of actual masks, research suggests, is to prevent asymptomatic people from inadvertently spreading the virus to others. A face shield doesn't do that. Still, if you have a medical condition that precludes you from wearing a mask or other approved facial covering – no bandannas or scarves, please – talk to your Human Resources consultant. If you're not sure who that is, go to [HR Café](#) and look at the top right of the page for the little envelope with "HRC" next to it.

Health and safety: I heard that there's a list of scenarios advising us on how to handle customers, field work, vehicle use and more. Where are those?

You heard right. Teams at L&I gave a lot of thought to a wide variety of work scenarios involving coronavirus issues, and have published these [easy-to-use one-pagers](#) describing how to handle these situations.

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Ergonomics: My telework site is different than my desk and hasn't had an ergonomic assessment.

Here's [how to get a virtual ergonomics assessment](#) from an L&I ergonomics expert, as well as a link to a handy self-assessment, contact info and more. With supervisor approval, you can also [get your chair, your monitors, keyboard, and other computer peripherals](#). The agency will also have your office chair delivered to your home if you like.

Telework: If I'm teleworking and need to come into the office, will my travel to the office be considered work time?

Not in this case, because your duty station remains the same. With the governor's stay-home, stay-safe proclamation, we are strongly encouraging people NOT to come into the office.

Health and safety: How would I know if I was in contact with a COVID-positive coworker?

If an employee tests positive for coronavirus and L&I is made aware of it, we will work directly with the employee to identify close contacts as defined by public health. We'll reach out to employees who were in close contact with the employee and discuss quarantine options.

Health and safety: What's considered "close contact?"

The CDC [updated its guidance](#) on this recently. Here's the current definition:

"Someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period starting from 2 days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic patients, 2 days prior to test specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated."

Leave time: I have vacation time I have to use or lose before my work anniversary date. I had plane tickets and reservations I had to cancel due to the pandemic. Is it possible that the "use it or lose it" policy can be extended for a few months beyond our anniversary date, which will allow us to actually go on vacation?

We encourage you to take your leave, even if it's a staycation. These are stressful times, and we've all been working hard. A mental break is always a good idea for people's mental wellness, especially after a year like 2020 has been. Also, you can consider donating excess leave.



Keep scrolling for additional resources!

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Additional resources

- Customer questions: L&I has a [public web page on coronavirus](#). It includes important answers on L&I offices, paid sick leave, workers' compensation and workplace safety.
 - If you get an external question you cannot answer, send it to our [mailbox for customer questions about coronavirus](#).
- [Washington State Department of Health coronavirus webpage](#): Symptoms, how coronavirus spreads, and prevention.
- [State Department of Health workplace and employer recommendations](#): Recommendations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).
- [Employee Assistance Program — Tips for coping with stress during coronavirus](#).
- [DOSH advice for a safe and healthy telework setup](#).

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