



Office of the Assistant
Secretary for
Administration

1400 Independence
Avenue, SW
Washington, DC
20250

TO: All USDA Employees

FROM: Dr. Gregory Parham *Gregory Parham*
Interim Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration

SUBJECT: USDA COVID Workplace Safety Required Actions

DATE: January 29, 2021

On January 20, 2021, President Biden signed an [Executive Order on Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask-Wearing](#). The goal of the Executive Order is to halt the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) by relying on the best available data and science-based public health measures. These measures include wearing masks, physical distancing, and other related precautions recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The coronavirus pandemic is a national emergency that requires a national response by our Federal government. Therefore, the Office of the Secretary has determined that this EO and guidance provided by CDC requires all on-duty or on-site USDA employees, on-site USDA contractors, and all persons in USDA buildings or on USDA lands to wear face masks, maintain physical distance, and take other public health measures as appropriate, which may include wearing a face shield or other personal protective equipment (PPE). USDA managers and supervisors shall take action that is appropriate and consistent with this requirement and, if necessary, with applicable laws to require compliance with these requirements.

Appropriate actions include, but are not limited to:

- Offering maximum telework flexibilities to all current telework eligible employees, consistent with operational needs of the Mission Areas and Staff offices as determined by their heads. In addition, we encourage agencies to use all existing authorities to offer telework to additional employees, to the extent their work could be telework enabled.
- Requiring face masks and maintaining physical distance by all on-duty or on-site USDA employees and on-site USDA contractors. [*Note: USDA recognizes that wearing masks may be difficult for some people. If they are unable to wear a mask properly, they should request an accommodation and adaptations and alternatives must and will be considered. Accommodations will be made for employees with required documentation and should be in accordance with existing USDA and Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC) guidance.*]
- Providing timely access to appropriate PPE to all employees when requested.
- Requiring face masks and maintaining physical distance by all persons coming into USDA buildings for reasons including but not limited to business or visitation or entering onto USDA lands for reasons including but not limited to recreation or to attend a sanctioned event.

[Note: Appropriate masks should be worn consistently, including in outdoor shared spaces and USDA vehicles when physical distancing cannot be maintained. If a mask cannot be worn due to exceptions such as eating or drinking, maintaining physical distance is required.]

- Posting signage at gateways of entry, doors, reception desks, commons areas such as restrooms and hallways, conference rooms, Ranger District stations, as well as on USDA websites and web pages that provide information about services offered at USDA locations.
 - Messages that work:
 - Message 1: To help us reduce the spread of COVID-19, effective immediately, all employees, vendors and guests visiting this USDA facility are required to wear a face mask and maintain physical distance. Thank you.
 - Message 2: Please help us reduce the spread of COVID-19 and protect the USDA employees working on-site by wearing a face mask and practicing physical distancing when inside this USDA facility. Thank you.

USDA employees should be considerate when making customers and visitors aware of these requirements. Customers and visitors who will not honor USDA's requirement should be asked, politely, to do so. To the extent funds are available, USDA may purchase masks to provide to customers and visitors but is not required to provide masks. If the customer or visitor refuses, please understand that is the individual's right, but that they must be directed to conduct business off-site (over the phone or online) and to please depart the premises. USDA employees should remain respectful yet safe and call for assistance from local authorities if the situation cannot be resolved.