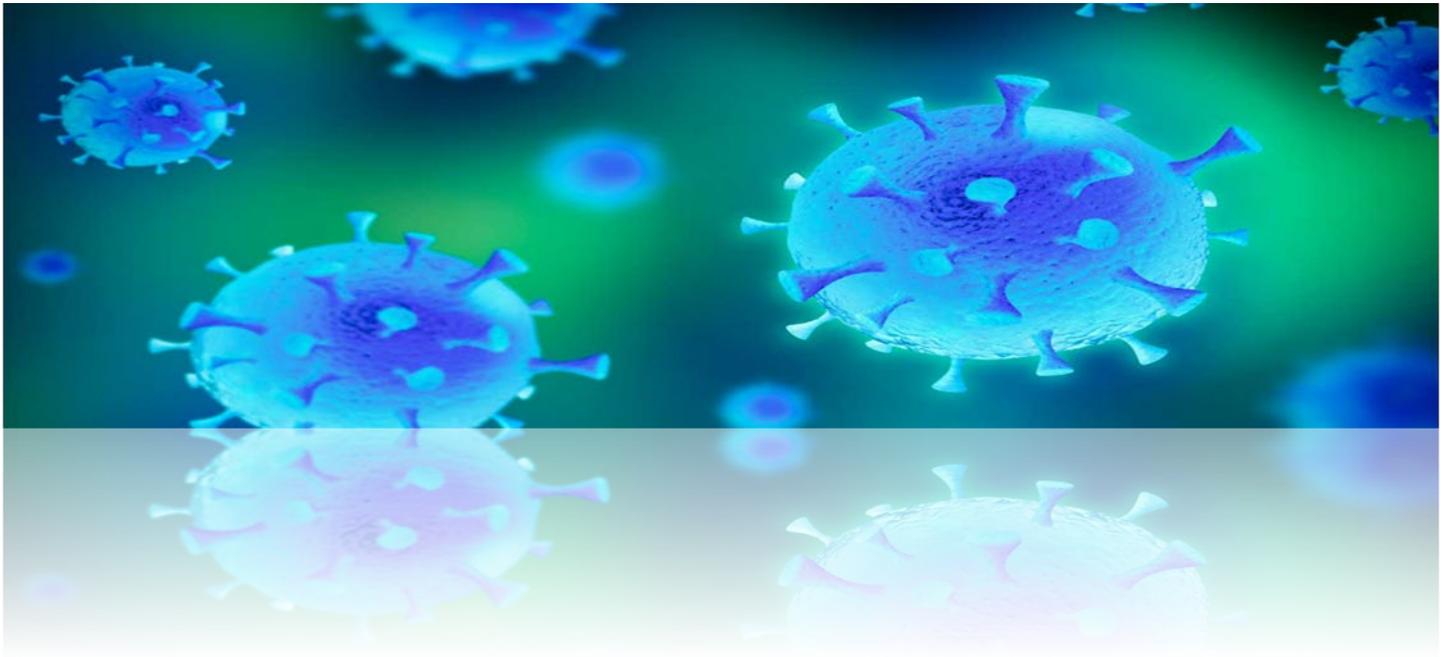


**United States Department of Agriculture**  
Farm Production and Conservation Mission Area  
(FPAC)



# **FPAC COVID WORKPLACE SAFETY SOP**

*This document supplements the USDA Workplace Safety Plan (dated February 22, 2021)*

**Version 5 – April 5, 2021**

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# Summary

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) supersedes the previous FPAC guidance that was issued in May 2020 and will govern all FPAC facilities and employees.

The [USDA Workplace Safety Plan](#) serves as the basis for this SOP and shall be followed unless further clarified in this document.

FPAC will continue to use the established Incident Management Team as the clearinghouse for all facility staffing requests and will depend on State and Hub Pandemic Coordinators to evaluate local conditions and collaborate with all FPAC agencies and other collocated Federal agencies.

The authoritative sources that will inform State and local Pandemic Coordinators on community spread will be the [FPAC COVID Dashboard](#) and the [CDC COVID Data Tracker](#). Local leaders must consult these tools when applying this SOP.

This guidance will take precedence if a state unilaterally moves ahead of USDA's guidance.

## FPAC Facility Staffing Process

1. FPAC's Office Staffing Process follows USDA and CDC guidance.
2. All FPAC Facilities will operate with not more than 25% of employees in the office at any one time.
3. Exceptions to the 25% Rule:
  - a. Service Centers may operate at higher than 25% occupancy if physical distancing permits. In the event of a rise in COVID cases, some locations may be required to return to lower staffing levels based on guidance from the FPAC COVID Incident Management Team.
  - b. FPAC facilities that would only be allowed 1 employee under the 25% rule, may have 2 employees in the office if physical distancing permits.
  - c. NRCS Plant Material Centers and Soils Laboratories may have sufficient staffing to complete required work, providing all work is conducted outdoors with masks and physical distancing. Up to 50% of total staff may work inside the facility (each building) unless the criteria below are met.

## Additional Guidance for all FPAC Facilities:

- FPAC Hub locations, State Offices and RMA Offices may allow up to 25% of employees in the facility, providing the minimum 6 ft physical distancing can be maintained under all circumstances.
- Service Centers may allow higher occupancy (as indicated above), as long as physical distancing can be maintained. All Service Centers may have at least 2 people in the office with appropriate physical distancing.
- **If multiple agencies are located in the facility and their offices are separated by walls or on different floors, each agency may operate at the authorized strength for that type of facility as long as physical distancing can be maintained.**
  - The number and on-site positioning of employees returning to work must be determined based on the ability to follow all Social Hygiene and Cleaning Protocols including the use of appropriate PPE.

- This number is intended as a maximum, not a goal. Leaders at Hub locations, State Offices, Service Centers, and Regional Offices will assess the maximum daily capacity based on the ability to physically separate employees within the facility.
- In locations with multiple agencies, the SFAC Chair or Hub Coordinator must coordinate to provide assurance an equitable distribution of employees allowed in the office across all agencies within a single physical space.
- Partner agency employees must be counted in the total number of people allowed in the office.
- Since office space is provided for County Committee members and FSA and NRCS District Directors, and SWCD employees, they may be included in the number used to calculate the 25% total.
- FPAC Agencies should prioritize the return of employees and contractors whose work does not permit telework, are deemed mission-critical, or are customer-facing. Agencies co-located with another USDA agency or federal department need to coordinate facility capacity and maximum physical distancing.
- [High-risk](#) individuals as defined by the CDC who have self-certified should be allowed to continue maximum telework flexibility at this time.
- Consistent child and dependent care, and mass transit availability should be factored into the decision of requiring employees to return to the office.
- Leaders should consider establishing a team approach or staggered work schedule that would place a group in the office, while another is on telework.
- **For Service Centers that are currently operating at up to 50% office staffing, visitors are permitted by appointment only.**

Visits to FPAC Service Centers must be conducted in a safe manner and focus heavily on protecting both employees and customers through proper physical distancing, mask wearing and cleaning. All FPAC Service Centers should follow [CDC's facility hygiene and cleaning guidance](#).

Visitors should only be allowed in Service Centers that have the space to physically distance employee and visitors. If this is not possible, Service Centers should continue to provide all service through remote means. The safety of our employees and customers will always be our highest priority.

- Visits should be permitted for essential, time-sensitive service only.
- Visitors must be escorted at all times and access is limited to non-essential areas of the facility. Visitors should not enter employee office spaces or go beyond a service counter.
- Prior to entry, all visitors should be asked to complete symptom screening. A questionnaire is attached.
- Visitors are required to wear masks at all times while inside a USDA facility and should physically distance to the greatest extent possible while engaging with USDA employees. Masks must be worn at all times while conducting business at a USDA facility, regardless of local or state policies
- Only one visitor should be allowed in the Service Center at a time unless there is sufficient space to allow 6 feet of distance between visitors at all times. Scheduling of appointments must allow sufficient time between visitors to ensure proper cleaning of workspaces, service counter and items that would be frequently touched by visitors in accordance with [CDC guidance](#).
- Visitors are not permitted to wait for their appointment inside a USDA facility, unless there is sufficient space to allow 6 feet of distance between visitors. It is recommended that facilities obtain cell phone

numbers from visitors (whenever possible) prior to the appointment and call them when you are ready for their appointment.

- When possible, it is recommended that Service Centers have a physical barrier (such as plexiglass) between employees and visitors and that physical distance be maintained to the extent possible.
- If no Service Counter is available, but the facility has a conference room (e.g. NRCS), the conference room may be used to meet with visitors. Visitors must be distanced from employees at all times. This is to be used as a last resort, remote services and physically distanced visits to producers are preferable.
- Service Centers may utilize their discretionary supply funds to purchase masks to be available for producers
- Local leadership within a facility that houses multiple tenants should coordinate with each other to ensure awareness of all visitors, as appropriate.
- Office Doors should remain locked and visitors should be notified that office staff will allow visitor's entry at their specified appointment time.
- If a Service Center is notified by a visitor that they have tested positive for COVID, all FPAC notification, quarantine and office cleaning procedures must be followed. Additionally, if an employee who had direct contact with a visitor tests positive, the customer should be notified.
- Service Centers should maintain a log of visitors.
- If COVID cases rise to high levels in a location, the visitor access may be suspended until safer conditions return.

- **LincPass stations may reopen using the same criteria as other visitors.**

- It is recommended that at least 30 minutes be allowed between each appointment to allow for all equipment to be cleaned between each appointment.
- Facilities that are reopening LincPass stations must notify the FPAC COVID Incident Management Team at [FPAC-COVID19@usda.gov](mailto:FPAC-COVID19@usda.gov) prior to reopening.

- Conference rooms and other common facilities should only be used for critical, time sensitive meetings and other events that cannot be performed virtually but where physical distancing is maintained.
- Appropriate [signage](#) must be posted as stated in the Workplace Safety Plan.
- Only mission essential, time sensitive business travel will be considered. (This does not preclude NRCS and FSA field work, and RMA field staff and their associated contractors including Approved Insurance Providers' agents and loss adjustors. with proper social distancing). Any local requirements for quarantining upon return from travel should be followed.
- All potential new COVID exposures must follow the guidance in the Exposure Risk Matrix (Appendix A) and must be reported immediately via [https://usdafpacbc.servicenow.com/health\\_updates](https://usdafpacbc.servicenow.com/health_updates) or [FPAC-COVID19@usda.gov](mailto:FPAC-COVID19@usda.gov) (if access to the ServiceNow tool is unavailable). New COVID cases or exposure in the facility, or significant change in the community may require the facility to return to differ FPAC COVID Condition.
- In accordance with [CDC Guidance](#), fully vaccinated people can:
  - Visit with other fully vaccinated people indoors without wearing masks or physical distancing.
  - Visit with unvaccinated people from a single household who are at low risk for severe COVID-19 disease, indoors without wearing masks or physical distancing.

- Refrain from quarantine and testing following a known exposure to COVID-19 if the vaccinated person remains asymptomatic
- Fully vaccinated people should continue to take precautions in public and when:
  - Visiting unvaccinated people at increased risk for severe COVID-19
  - Visiting unvaccinated people from multiple households
  - Follow guidance from employers, and CDC and health department travel recommendations

Indicator	
<b>Percentage of Workforce allowed in the office</b>	Up to 25% Occupancy permitted with Physical Distancing for Hub locations, State Offices and RMA Offices. Service Centers may allow higher occupancy (as indicated above), as directed by the FPAC COVID Incident Management Team as long as physical distancing can be maintained. All Service Centers may have at least 2 people in the office with appropriate physical distancing
<b>Telework</b>	As possible to meet mission requirements
<b>Masks</b>	Must be available to all employees. Required at all times unless in an office with floor to ceiling walls and a closed door, briefly while eating or drinking, alone in a USDA vehicle, or while performing field work outdoors and physically distanced.
<b>At Risk Employees</b>	Employees defined as <a href="#">high risk</a> by CDC may maximum use telework flexibility
<b>Travel</b>	Mission essential, time sensitive travel only
<b>Visitors</b>	Visitors are permitted at Service Centers operating at 50% of office staffing under the guidelines listed on pages 4 and 5. Visitors are not permitted at other FPAC facilities at this time.
<b>Meetings</b>	Virtual is recommended, in person employee meetings must include masks and cannot exceed the number of people permitted by physical distancing
<b>Common Areas</b>	Limited and essential use only, with masks and physical distancing
<b>Office Cleaning</b>	Very frequent, daily if possible, with spot cleaning of frequently touched surfaces throughout the day

# FPAC Travel Guidance

- Mission essential, time sensitive travel is defined as overnight travel to support operational matters that cannot be conducted remotely or deferred to a later date.
- Field work, including repair of FPAC IT equipment, is authorized provided mask, physical distancing and proper hygiene practices are followed. Field work requiring visits to FPAC facilities must be coordinated with the County Executive Director and/or District Conservationist prior to the visit.
- In-person training does not meet the criteria of mission essential, time sensitive travel unless it is required to maintain a certification that enables an employee to complete their duties, and the certifying body has not granted extensions or remote opportunities. All in person certification training should be approved by State and/or Headquarters leadership prior to any individual attending the training.
- Conferences and large gatherings (more than 50 people) present a high-risk situation at this time and do not meet the definition of mission essential, time sensitive travel and will be avoided.
- More than one person may occupy a Government vehicle, but masks must be worn, and it is recommended that windows be left partially open if possible. The interior of the vehicle should be cleaned at the beginning and end of use and if the driver changes.

Overnight Travel	Local Travel/Field Work	Local Training	Large Gatherings
Overnight travel that cannot be deferred must be approved at the State or HQ level.	Work that cannot be deferred is permitted. All precautions must be followed. Mission delivery field work will continue following appropriate precautions.	Conducting or attending group training is not permitted.	In person attendance at conferences and trade shows is not permitted.

## Appendix A

### Exposure Response Matrix

If an FPAC facility has an exposure after beginning the reopening process, this matrix will be followed to determine immediate actions.

