



NASA's Approach to Return to On-Site Work (RTOW)

FOR CIVIL SERVANTS

Contractor employees should speak to their contractor management about return to on-site work policies and procedures.

GENERAL

1. What are the overarching principles guiding the agency's approach?

- a. The health and safety of the NASA workforce is the agency's top priority.
- b. Agency and center leaders are taking a risk-based, phased, and methodical approach.
- c. Center RTOW plans are focused on establishing the safest environment possible while transitioning gradually to accomplish the highest priority mission-critical tasks.
- d. Implementation will be based on work that absolutely has to be done on-site.
- e. Those who can accomplish their work via telework are encouraged to continue doing so until further notice.

2. What's the rush?

We're not rushing to open centers and facilities to full on-site work, but we are rushing to plan – to have a path forward. Each center now has a plan that includes criteria that guide the center's move from their current stage down to the next one, and then the next, until the center is at Stage 1.

The plans also will account for the possibility of reemergence of the virus. If COVID-19 makes a resurgence in the local community or state, centers may revert back to Stage 3 or 4. This determination will be made by center and agency leadership.

3. What can I do to keep myself, my family, and my coworkers safe?

Personal responsibility sometimes means staying home, especially if you have symptoms and/or are sick. Don't be afraid to pull yourself out.

It's strongly recommended that you wear a face covering when you're in public, going back and forth between buildings, passing people in the hallway, on mass transit, etc. You also should continue following the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance on social distancing measures to minimize the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on our workforce. All employees are encouraged to familiarize themselves with this guidance, available online at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>.

Center plans also will include protective measures to take upon returning to work on-site.

4. How will I know when I'm expected to return to on-site work?

Each center's RTOW plan will have notification procedures that the center will follow. Please look for communications from your center leadership.



5. If I'm told I must report back on-site, but do not feel comfortable doing so, what are my options?

If you do not feel comfortable returning to work on-site or continuing to work on-site, talk to your supervisor about options to address your concerns. If you are not satisfied with the response, you can talk to your center safety director or safety manager. If that outcome is not satisfactory, you can directly contact NASA's Chief of Safety and Mission Assurance at Headquarters. Every effort will be made to provide alternate work arrangements without reservation or reprisal.

6. Will I be provided personal protective equipment (PPE)?

NASA is doing a bulk buy for all centers. If you are performing work on-site and will be working in an area where you cannot social distance by 6 feet or you are in a high-risk/vulnerable population, you will be provided PPE.

TELEWORK

7. When will mandatory telework end?

Mandatory telework will end at different times for each center. Once a center reaches Stage 2 of the [NASA Framework for Return to On-Site Work](#), mandatory telework will end. However, under Stage 2, employees who can accomplish work remotely are encouraged to continue teleworking. When the center reaches Stage 1 of the RTOW Framework, employees should be ready to return to on-site work unless other arrangements are made with their supervisor.

8. Must I submit a formal request to continue teleworking after the mandatory telework requirement is lifted at my center?

Yes. You also must coordinate with your supervisor to implement workplace flexibilities, including continuation of teleworking, working outside core hours, or assignment of alternative work duties, to ensure the employee's concerns and needs are addressed.

Note: NASA's top priority is the health, safety, and well-being of our employees. During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic, supervisors are encouraged to allow work place flexibilities (e.g., working outside core hours, continuation of teleworking, assignment of alternative work duties, etc.).

9. What should an employee do if they want to request a reasonable accommodation to continue to telework due to a medical condition?

Employees should reference the NASA Reasonable Accommodations FAQs section of the Supervisor FAQs on Telework, Leave, and Pay for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) at: https://nasapeople.nasa.gov/coronavirus/general_telework_faqs_for_supervisors.pdf.



LEAVE

10. Once my center is no longer under mandatory telework, may I still request excused leave (XLV) due to school or care facility closures?

Yes. During this pandemic, employees are eligible for up to 20 hours per pay period of excused leave (XLV) for caregiving responsibilities due to school and/or care facility closures. Employees should continue to communicate with their supervisors if they need this type of leave.

All employees and supervisors are encouraged to use the full spectrum of available workplace flexibilities (e.g., working outside of core hours, teleworking, assignment of alternate duties, etc.) to support dependent care obligations. In the rare instance that an employee requests more than 20 hours of excused leave, the employee's second-level supervisor may approve additional hours, considering the employee's circumstances and mission needs.

For additional information on this type of leave, please review the FAQs on [caregiving and excused leave](#).

Note: Due to the academic school year being complete (or nearly complete) for most of the nation, dependent care facility closures are being expanded to include camps or other similar summer programs.

11. When will excused leave for caregiving no longer be authorized due to COVID-19?

Because COVID-19 is still a developing situation, and it is unclear when the pandemic will end, there currently is no time limit associated with excused leave for caregiving. NASA will continue to authorize maximum flexibilities for employees to the furthest extent of the law, to include continuation of excused leave for dependent care.

12. For localities where schools and care facilities are still closed and the employee is having difficulties finding dependent care, will NASA still support the use of work schedule flexibilities?

Yes. NASA encourages all employees and supervisors to utilize the full spectrum of available workplace flexibilities, including telework and flexible work schedules, to support employees with children and other dependent care obligations.

RTOW CRITERIA

13. If and where federal guidelines differ from state and/or local guidelines, what criteria will NASA centers use in determining when and how to increase on-site work?

NASA centers and facilities will follow federal guidelines, as well as state and local guidelines, which may be more restrictive than federal guidelines. Where guidance differs, center RTOW plans will take into account the most conservative the safest path for all employees.



14. What is the federal guidance for increasing on-site work?

The White House recently released [Guidelines for Opening Up America Again](#), followed by guidance from the Office of Management and Budget and Office of Personnel Management memo number M-20-23, [Aligning Federal Agency Operations with the National Guidelines for Opening Up American Again](#). This guidance allows epidemiologic risk-based assessments of conditions in the state and local areas to guide a phased approach to resuming nominal operations. This document serves to provide additional NASA guidelines for preparing to resume nominal operations.

The White House and OMB guidelines incorporate gating criteria which must be met in a state or county (in addition to preparedness responsibilities) before proceeding to the phased reopening process:

- a. influenza-like illnesses and COVID-like cases of illness must trend downward for 14 days;
- b. documented COVID-19 cases and prevalence of positive tests must trend downward for 14 days (while not decreasing the overall number of tests); and
- c. local hospitals must have the capacity to treat all patients without crisis care and jurisdictions must have a robust healthcare worker testing program and plan in place.

HIGH-RISK/VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

15. Who is considered to be in a higher risk group, in terms of contracting the virus?

High-risk/vulnerable populations, as defined by the CDC, may be at increased risk of contracting COVID-19 and experiencing more severe symptoms. This includes, but is not limited to, individuals:

- aged 65 and over -or-
- who have underlying health conditions, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, chronic lung disease (asthma, emphysema, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) -or-
- who are on immune-lowering medications for chronic disease or cancer chemotherapy.

Any employee who fits into one or more of the above categories, or has health factors not mentioned here but which may place them at higher risk, should engage their supervisor to determine if it would be appropriate to continue teleworking or whether you may require some other workplace modification until National Phase 3/NASA Stage 1 is reached.¹ Please note, much is unknown about the risk of this virus to women who are pregnant or breast-feeding.

Employees who have a medical disability, also may make a request for a reasonable accommodation under the Rehabilitation Act consistent with NASA's Reasonable Accommodation Process and should contact their supervisor and Center [EEO Office](#).

¹Some individuals in the high risk population may be individuals with disabilities under the Rehabilitation Act; whereas some individuals will not be. The decision of whether they are legally entitled to an accommodation will be made on a case-by-case basis consistent with NASA's Reasonable Accommodation Process.



16. “If I’m in a high-risk/vulnerable group, can I return to on-site work?”

Employees with these conditions are not required to stay home, but they should be aware that these conditions are shown to place them at higher risk from COVID-19 outcomes and must make a personal risk decision with regards to on-site work versus telework in the early stages of the plan.

Again, these individuals are not required to telework, but it’s encouraged that they continue to telework and shelter in place when case counts are high or until a community reaches the appropriate gates.

Also consider the health and safety of those in your household. By returning to work, or other public environments, it’s possible to carry the virus home. If you return to on-site work, you are encouraged to take precautions to isolate yourself from vulnerable individuals in your home.

WORKPLACE RISK MITIGATION

17. What is being done to make our workspaces safer?

Each center will distribute guidance on employee workspace and safety precautions. This guidance may vary from center to center. Employees should contact their supervisor with any related concerns.

The agency also has formed a Clean Team Task Force, which includes industrial hygiene professionals from multiple centers who are exploring various options for cleaning NASA facilities/workspaces. Included in their analyses are the safety and delivery methods of various cleaning agents, as well as ideal HVAC system settings for optimal air filtration.

The task force is looking at what's used in the hotel and airline industries, as well as practices employed by other government agencies, to develop a benchmark.

18. Has this situation caused the agency to rethink how workspaces are designed?

Agency leadership has been and will continue to use lessons learned from COVID-19. We will be evaluating our overall approach to work environments across the agency based on lessons learned from the pandemic and make changes, as appropriate, to better protect the health and safety of the workforce, knowing we have this challenge in front of us.

It's not just the challenge that we're going to pay attention to today, next week, next month, but it's a challenge that we're going to have to pay attention for the months and years to come with COVID-19.

There will be limitations with respect to what we can do to change the work environment, what is practical to change, and what is feasible to change, from a time and budget standpoint. But all of this is done with the highest priority and to protect the health and safety of the workforce.