

# COVID-19 FAQs for Contractors and Subcontractors with Employees Working at SSA Facilities 10/6/2022

The term “contractor/subcontractor employees” as used in this document includes:

- 1) a sole proprietorship where the contractor is the sole employee and
- 2) employees of contractors and contractor’s subcontractors.

**Q#1** - If a contractor/subcontractor employee has been in close contact (i.e., within 6 feet for a cumulative 15 minutes or more) with a person diagnosed (laboratory-confirmed case) or advised (probable case) by a licensed health-care professional to self-quarantine due to COVID-19, what options are available for contract performance?

Contractors are no longer required to report employee exposures to the OPE Medical Office.

**CDC guidance** no longer recommends quarantining after exposure to COVID-19 regardless of vaccination status. Asymptomatic employees who had close contact with someone with COVID-19 and who work onsite will report to work at their SSA office.

**Contractors/subcontractors must:**

- wear high-quality face masks for 10 full days after the exposure;

Note: A “high-quality” mask is a well-fitting procedure mask, surgical mask, or KN95 mask—not a cloth mask. See CDC guidance for [Masks and Respirators \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/masks/).

- monitor for **symptoms** for 10 full days from the date they were last known to have been exposed; and
- test for COVID-19 at least 5 full days after last exposure to COVID-19 (i.e., ideally on day 6 or after). If they test negative, they should follow the instructions above for the remainder of the 10 full days from the last known exposure.

## **Contractor/Subcontract Tests Positive or Symptoms Develop**

If contractors develop symptoms at any point during the 10-day monitoring period, they must isolate and test for COVID-19 immediately. If they report confirmed positive COVID-19 test results, refer to question #2.

If a contractor tested positive for COVID-19 with a [viral test](#) within the previous 30 days, recovered, and remains asymptomatic, they do not need to get tested after a known exposure. If a contractor tested positive for COVID-19 with a viral test within the previous 31-90 days, recovered and remains asymptomatic, they should be tested using a viral antigen (rapid) test.

See also: [CDC guidance on specific testing recommendations for those that have had COVID-19 within the past 90 days.](#))

The agency will provide offices a supply of FDA-approved COVID-19 test kits. Within headquarters, regional offices, and larger facilities, test kits will be available from the Employee Health Centers. If contractors notify managers of their exposure to COVID-19 and request a COVID-19 test kit, managers will give them a test kit and instruct them to use the test on day 6 after exposure. Contractors may use up to 30 minutes of official duty time for testing performed at home on the day of the test. Contractors will use the office supply of test kits if available rather than reporting to testing locations.

If offices do not have test kits available, they must allow contractors to test at a provider of their choice on duty time. The Department of Health and Human Services has an extensive list of testing locations throughout the country that provide free or reduced cost COVID tests, which can be found here: [Community-Based Testing Sites for COVID-19 | HHS.gov](#). We will reimburse employees any reasonable expenses for these tests, and will pay reasonable travel costs, in accordance with the agency official travel rules.

**Q#2 - If a contractor/subcontractor employee is diagnosed with COVID-19, what is the isolation protocol?**

The CDC has shortened the timeframes for isolation to 5 days after the onset of symptoms, provided that symptoms are improving, and individuals have been fever-free for 24 hours.

- However, certain contractors must isolate for 10 full days and contact their supervisor if:
  - Their symptoms have not improved at Day 5, or
  - They had moderate illness--shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, or
  - They have a weakened immune system, or
  - They had severe illness--were hospitalized.
- Contractors who had severe illness or have a weakened immune system should consult their doctor before ending isolation.

Contractors should check with their COR-COTR to determine which of their employees may work from home.

As long as contractor/subcontractor employees are: 1) not needed in the SSA facility; 2) have portable work; and 3) the necessary equipment to perform their duties at an alternate duty station, they may work from home.

If the contractor/subcontractor employees meet the qualifications above but have equipment issues that impede working from home, they should alert their employer who will, in turn, inform the COR-COTR (COR-COTR will consult with the designated Contracting Officer as necessary).

The contractor/subcontractor employee must report the COVID-19 diagnosis to his/her employer. In the case of a subcontractor employee, the subcontractor must report the diagnosis to the contractor. The contractor, in turn, must notify the COR-COTR of the diagnosis at least 24-hours

prior to the contractor/subcontractor employee reporting for work at an SSA facility. The contractor/subcontractor employee must refrain from entering an SSA facility until cleared by the agency to do so. The COR-COTR must notify the OPE Medical Office at ^DCHR OPE Medical Office for appropriate contact tracing.

**No Workplace Impact: Contractor/subcontractor employee has not physically been onsite at an SSA facility during the past 10 days and will not be reporting to an SSA facility in the next 30 days (e.g., will be working at home):**

Contractors do not need to report information to SSA because this information has no impact on SSA facilities.

**Q#3 – Does a contractor need to report when a contract employee was in an SSA facility while positive with COVID-19?**

Yes. The contractor/subcontractor employee must notify the COR-COTR of the incident immediately. The COR-COTR must notify the OPE Medical Office at ^DCHR OPE Medical Office for appropriate contact tracing.

**Q#4 - What should onsite contractor/subcontractor employees who develop symptoms of a respiratory illness or fever during the workday do?**

Onsite contractor/subcontractor employees who develop symptoms potentially associated with COVID-19 during the workday will immediately notify their employer, promptly leave the worksite, and may not report onsite until they receive permission from their employer. The contractor/subcontractor must immediately notify the COR-COTR of the incident. The COR/COTR will assess and advise the contractor/subcontractor on reporting to the worksite according to Q#5 below and may consult the agency's Medical Office if they have questions. As with any illness, the contractor employee should call their medical provider, as warranted.

**Q#5 - Does SSA have requirements to prevent the spread of COVID-19 when working or visiting SSA facilities?**

The agency is providing hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies, additional Plexiglas barriers (where needed and approved), and cleaning in accordance with CDC guidelines for all facilities. See Q#6 below for instruction regarding masks.

Visitors seeking a public benefit must be served at a distance of 6 feet even when a barrier is used, so contractor employees should monitor seating accordingly.

Close contact is a **cumulative** (not consecutive) of 15 minutes in a 24-hour period. Contractor employees must conduct a health self-screening assessment before entering SSA facilities in accordance with the following posted guidance at facility entrances:

- Do you have any new or worsening symptoms of COVID-19 including:
  - Fever (100.4 degrees or higher) or chills;
  - Cough or sore throat;

- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing;
- Fatigue;
- Muscle pain or body aches;
- Headache;
- New loss of taste or smell;
- Congestion or runny nose; or
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea?
- Within the last 10 days, have you:
  - Had moderate or severe COVID-19 illness (i.e., shortness of breath or difficulty breathing)?
- Within the last 5 days, have you:
  - Been diagnosed with COVID-19?

On a daily basis, prior to reporting onsite to an SSA facility, contractor employees must assess their health status using the checklist above and contact their employer if they meet any of the criteria. The contractor (employer) will advise the employee as to whether they should work at 6 home and notify the COR-COTR accordingly. If the contractor employee is still symptomatic after 72 hours, the contractor (employer) will ask the employee to contact a medical provider and provide medical documentation to the employer before returning to an SSA facility. The medical provider, not the contractor, will determine whether to test for COVID-19.

**Please note that if an individual has been within 6 feet of a person who was diagnosed with COVID-19 within the last 10 days, they should follow the guidance in Q#1.**

**Q#6 - What is our policy for physical distancing and masks? Will the agency provide masks for employees and contractors?**

**In compliance with guidance from the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force, we will no longer differentiate safety protocols between employees based on vaccination status.**

Employees and contractors do not need to physically distance from others except where required by Federal, State, local, Tribal, or territorial laws, rules, or regulations, but must physically distance six feet from members of the public seeking a public service or benefit.

When COVID-19 Community Levels are Medium or High, consider avoiding crowding and physically distancing from others in indoor common areas and meeting rooms.

All contractors/subcontractor employees must wear a mask when in an SSA facility and must also wear masks in outdoor spaces when physical distancing cannot be maintained. It is important that everyone wear the mask properly, which means always keeping both the nose and mouth covered and not lowering the mask to speak, etc. Employees, contractors, guards, and visitors may wear their own mask, as long as it meets [CDC recommendations](#) to cover their nose and mouth and does not have a ventilation valve. CDC also provides guidance on increasing mask effectiveness, such as layering a cloth mask over a disposable one or improving mask fit to the face. Contractor employees who are exposed to COVID-19 and must wear a high-quality mask (see Q#1).

If a contractor employee reports being unable to wear a mask due to a medical reason, the contractor will engage the reasonable accommodation process. If a contract employee reports being unable to wear a mask for a religious reason, the contractor will engage the religious accommodation process. Contractor employees who require a reasonable accommodation should contact their supervisors and request that the supervisor discuss the need with the contracting officer's representative (COR) or contracting officer as appropriate.

If a contractor employee does not provide a valid reason for not wearing a mask and refuses to wear one, the manager will contact the COR-COTR, who will initiate a conversation between the contractor employer, employee, and contracting officer. Following discussion with the COR-COTR and contracting officer, the contractor (employer) will require the contractor employee to leave SSA's facility and not return until the contractor employee agrees to comply with SSA's safety protocols and screening guidance. Any contractor employee who refuses to follow SSA's COVID policies may be removed from duty under the contract pursuant to the agency's Security and Suitability Requirements clause; paragraph (n)(12).

Contractors/subcontractor employees may not wear a face shield in lieu of a mask. CDC does not recommend substituting a face shield for a mask as face shields are not known to stop respiratory particles. If a contractor employee requests to use a face shield for a medical, disability, or religious reason, contractors should engage in the interactive reasonable accommodation process to find an effective alternative.

We will provide exceptions to the mask requirement in limited circumstances, including, when an individual is alone in an office with floor to ceiling walls and a closed door, or when eating or drinking. If individuals remove masks while eating or drinking with others, they must physically distance for at least 6 feet.

**Q#7 – What are the current COVID-19 vaccination and testing requirements for contractor staff working onsite at an SSA facility?**

NOTE: In consideration of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) *new* streamlined COVID-19 guidance issued on August 11, 2022, the Social Security Administration (SSA) is *pausing* COVID-19 vaccination attestation requirements (to include *Certification of Vaccination form* requirements) for Contractors, and Subcontractors working onsite at an SSA facility. Specifically, SSA personnel will no longer request or collect vaccination status information (i.e., *Certification of Vaccination form* or negative test results) from Contractors and Subcontractors working onsite at an SSA facility.