

City of Austin
500 4th Avenue NE
Austin, MN 55912
507-437-9940
www.ci.austin.mn.us



Tricia Wiechmann
Human Resources Director
507-437-9942
twiechma@ci.austin.mn.us

CITY OF AUSTIN
EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION – COVID-19
3/19/20

Notice to employees:

All City of Austin employees are asked to read the following information carefully. The City has in place a Pandemic Plan (included with this notice) and will follow these guidelines. The City Council met on Monday, March 16 and passed a resolution to allow the City to amend current policies as necessary amid the COVID-19 Pandemic situation. Therefore, we are modifying some of our policies to allow employees the ability to care for themselves and others as needed during this time. Because this is a rapidly evolving situation, the City remains responsive to any new information or guidance that becomes available from public health officials. As such, these temporary measures may be modified, expanded or discontinued accordingly.

What this is:

COVID-19 is a virus identified in December 2019 that is primarily spread from person-to-person:

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

The following symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

Some patients have had other symptoms including muscle aches, headache, sore throat, or diarrhea.

Higher-Risk Individuals

The CDC indicates that some people are at higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19. This includes:

- Older adults (60 or older)
- People who have serious chronic medical conditions

If you are at higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19, it is extra important for you to take actions to reduce your risk of getting sick with the disease.

What does this mean for city services and operations?

As of Wednesday, March 18, 2020, City Hall, including administration, engineering and park & recreation administrative offices; public library, nature center interpretive center and the fire department have closed to the public without an appointment. Staff in these departments will continue to work and are available by telephone or email or otherwise arranged appointment. Required services will be maintained through additional precautionary steps.

What should employees do?

At the first sign of illness, you should leave work immediately to avoid exposing coworkers and you should stay home until fully recovered.

- For the safety of all employees, department heads do have the authority to require an individual with respiratory symptoms including fever, cough and shortness of breath or fatigue to leave the workplace. While supervisors should not make judgments about a medical diagnosis, they may rely on these symptoms to make a determination to send an employee home or suggest that they seek a doctor's diagnosis. If you are asked to leave work, you will be able to use accrued leave, as identified below, to cover your time away from work.

When returning to work:

Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are encouraged to stay home and may not come to work until both of the following are true:

- Free of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications for at least 24 hours (a fever is defined as 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or greater using an oral thermometer);
- Free of other symptoms, including cough

What to do if you've been exposed or potentially exposed to the virus:

In cases where you have had confirmed or likely exposure to COVID-19, you should immediately report this information to your supervisor. You may be required to remain at home for up to 14 days or until COVID-19 has been ruled out for you and the original contact person, with either a negative test result or other methods as they may be available. If approved, the City will allow you to utilize available sick leave for this purpose, even though you are asymptomatic, for any or all of the time away from work.

A physician's note stating that you may safely return to work may not be required.

- Clinics, hospitals and doctors' ability to attend to every individual is already strained, therefore the City will review this on a case by case basis.

Time off options:

NOTE: All time off requests, should be approved and coordinated with your supervisor. A direct correlation/exposure is required for those who are not exhibiting symptoms or otherwise

asymptomatic. Those who have general concerns over the virus would not be an allowable use of sick leave.

Sick Leave

Employees will be allowed to utilize their accrued unused sick leave in these circumstances:

- When you are sick
- When you are caring for a sick family member
- When you are caring for a child due to daycare closure caused by COVID-19
- For and COVID related instance as indicated above and including quarantine or positive COVID-19 diagnosis; employees will be allowed to have up to a 96-hour negative balance in their sick leave bank of time. Repayment of sick leave will occur through employees monthly sick leave posting (96 hours = 1-year accrual) until further notice.

If your sick leave runs out or is insufficient while using for bullets 1-3 above; you will first be required to use vacation, accrued compensatory time, accrued unused holiday time (only available to certain groups of employees – see applicable labor agreement) before being allowed to have a negative sick leave balance.

Short-term disability insurance options available for those employees who currently have this option, as well as the ability to add coverage prior to being sick (please see additional separate information from Aflac).

After having exhausted all other paid leave options, employees will be allowed to request sick leave donation through our current sick leave donation policy. A written request for donation will be required. Requests will be processed administratively through human resources as necessary. Further information will be available as necessary and finalized.

Vacation

Employees will be allowed to utilize their accrued unused vacation as paid time off and in lieu of sick leave for any of the instances as outlined above.

Compensatory Time

Employees will be allowed to utilize their accrued unused vacation as paid time off and in lieu of sick leave for any of the instances as outlined above.

Furlough

If you do not have any paid leave benefits available through the City, you may use up to 96-hours of unpaid furlough time, as identified in the City's furlough policy or request unpaid leave.

- The City Administrator has the discretion to review this policy and make necessary changes on a case-by-case review with the department head.

We anticipate that there will be bumps in the road as we navigate these next several weeks. Please reach out to your supervisor, human resources or the City Administrator if you run into issues or have feedback to help improve our service. Protecting our employees while providing the public critical services is our top priority.

If you have concerns about your work schedule, please talk to your supervisor.

If you are feeling anxious or experiencing other uncomfortable emotions, remember that **our confidential employee assistance program (EAP) is available to all employees.** The City of Austin will provide up to two (2) visits of one-hour duration for the employee and immediate family members per calendar year. Any visits beyond a total of two (2) billed hours to the City of Austin for the employee and/or their immediate family will be the responsibility of the employee for payment to the provider.

The City of Austin currently has contracts with both Cedar River Counseling Services, telephone 433-6482 and Mayo Health System – Behavioral Health Services, telephone 434-1856. When calling, please specify EAP. This service is completely confidential.

Finding Reliable Information

For information about COVID-19 you can trust, go to these websites:

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Minnesota Department of Health](#)