

SAFE OPENING OF HARRIS COUNTY COVID-19 EMPLOYEE TESTING POLICY

Question and Answer

COVID-19 Employee Testing Program

Q: What is the purpose of COVID-19 Employee Testing and who needs to be tested?

A: The purpose of the policy is to promote a safe and healthy workplace at Harris County for employees and visitors, which applies to all employees of departments under the direction of Commissioners Court. Under the policy, employees who are not fully vaccinated and works onsite one or more days during the week will be required to test weekly beginning Monday, November 29, 2021.

Q: Are all departments required to participate in the Employee Testing Policy?

A: All departments under the direction of Commissioners Court are required to participate. Elected Officials and Officials not appointed by Commissioners Court may choose to opt-out of the program. Departments are responsible for ensuring their employees are tested as required by the policy.

Q: What is the CDC's definition of fully vaccinated?

A: As of 11/15/2021, the CDC has not changed its definition of fully vaccinated. As per the CDC website, people are considered fully vaccinated:

- 2 weeks after their second dose in a 2-dose series, such as the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, or
- 2 weeks after a single-dose vaccine, such as Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine

Q. I work for an elected official who has decided not to participate in the testing program. Do I need to be tested?

A. The Commissioners Court order dated 11/9/2021 allowed elected officials to decide if employees within their purview are mandated to participate in the testing program. If the elected official leading your department decided to not participate, you are not required to do so.

Q: I am fully vaccinated and enrolled in the Silver Sticker Program, do I need to be tested as part of the Harris County Employee COVID-19 testing program?

A: As per the Commissioners Court Order dated 11/9, if you are enrolled in the Silver Sticker Program, you do not need to participate in the Harris County COVID-19 employee testing program.

Q: I am a fully vaccinated employee but not participating in the Silver Sticker program. I work in a department that reports to the Office of the County Administrator or an elected official participating in the testing program, do I still need to be tested?

A: If you are not participating in the Silver Sticker Program, you need to be tested even if you are fully vaccinated. Employees can participate in Silver Sticker Program by contacting their departmental HR Personnel.

Q: If I Telework, am I still required to test?

A: Employees who telework an entire week are exempted from testing that week. An employee who works onsite one or more days during the week is required to test for that week.

Q: Do I need to be tested while I am on vacation?

A: If you are taking a full week off from Monday to Friday, then you do not need to be tested that week. If you are taking part of the week off, then you need to be tested the week you return. All employees should follow the CDC travel guidance (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-during-covid19.html>)

Q: Are contract and temporary employees required to test?

A: Contract and temporary personnel employed by outside agencies are not subject to the COVID-19 Employee Testing policy. Only employees paid directly by Harris County are subject to the testing policy.

Q: Can an employee refuse the weekly testing?

A: Employees who do not comply with this policy may be subject to corrective action up to and including termination. Employees who knowingly submit false or misleading information regarding their COVID-19 test results, COVID-19 vaccination status, compensable time and travel time for testing, or request for an accommodation under this policy, shall be subject to corrective action up to and including termination.

Q: What type of COVID-19 test is performed or required?

A: Employees subject to testing are required to take a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test. Harris County Public Health (HCPH) will provide dedicated testing sites, at no-cost to employees for the PCR test. If an employee chooses to test at another provider, it must be a PCR test in order to comply with the testing policy.

Q: Why is a PCR test being used instead of a rapid (antigen) test in which I can get the results 15 minutes after testing?

A: PCR tests are the “gold standard” and are the most accurate at identifying someone carrying the virus, including in cases who are infectious while not displaying any symptoms. Rapid tests are generally effective at identifying positive cases in symptomatic persons and when community spread is high but are much less effective if the person has not developed symptoms or lives in an area where spread is currently low.

Rapid tests also do not accurately rule out those who are not infected and are therefore more prone to provide a false negative result. While waiting on test results, asymptomatic employees should report to their normal work location and wear a face covering in accordance with the most recent [order](#) from the County Judge and maintain social distancing.

If an employee becomes symptomatic after being tested and while waiting on the results, the employee should isolate at home and wear a face covering. If the employee becomes symptomatic after receiving a negative test result, they should isolate at home, wear a face covering and be retested.

Q: What is the registration process?

A: Employees shall work with their department to determine which location and day of the week works best for testing. To obtain testing through HCPH, employees should pre-register. The registration link for employees to schedule their COVID-19 tests is now available at <https://secure.hcphes.org/hcet/>. It is highly encouraged that your employees register for an appointment since walk-ins may not be accepted depending on the volume at the testing site. To assist in the planning and operations of the test sites, we request that your employees register for testing on the same day and time and testing location each week.

Your employees may also use one of the public COVID-19 testing sites operated in conjunction with Harris County Public Health by registering at <https://covcheck.hctx.net>.

Please note that testing site locations and hours are subject to change depending on utilization. For information regarding testing locations and employee registration, please contact Public Health at (832) 927-7575.

Q: What do I need bring to the testing site?

A: Upon scheduling your test using the HCPH website, you need to bring a copy of the code that was sent to you (an electronic copy is preferred) and your Harris County employee identification card.

Q: How will I receive my results?

A: Test results are directly reported to the employee with a 24–48 hour turnaround time. Once employees obtain their test results, they must provide the results to their department's Human Resources.

Q: Can employees test at a location outside of the Harris County Employee testing sites?

A: If the employee chooses to test at another location or provider, it must be a PCR test in order to comply with the testing policy. The employee must work with their department for approval.

Q: How should employees code time for the COVID-19 testing on their timesheet?

A: Employees obtaining a COVID-19 test at a HCPH site approved by their department, should code time spent obtaining the testing as work time. The Harris County Personnel Policies and Procedures will govern the compensability of travel time. If employees obtain COVID-19 testing on their own at a location other than an HCPH location, time spent testing will be considered work time if the employee obtained department head approval to test at the location and the time spent is considered reasonable by the employee's department head.

Q: What is the protocol for employees who test positive for COVID-19? Who should be notified?

A: Each employee testing positive or with symptoms of COVID-19 should not report to work but rather contact their supervisor and their department's Human Resources. Employees testing positive are also encouraged to contact their health care provider immediately and seek medical treatment, if necessary. Department Heads should determine whether FMLA applies to the employee's absences. Department Heads are encouraged to allow employees who test positive, or with symptoms, to telework, if feasible. For return to work protocol, departments should follow County guidance (see Harris County COVID-19: Resource Guide for Conducting County Business by the Continuity of Government (COG) Task Force).

Q: What if an employee receives an inconclusive test result?

A: If an employee receives an inconclusive test result, the employee can return to work. We encourage the employee to wear a facemask and social distance until the employee's next test date.

Q: I have symptoms associated with COVID-19, what should I do?

A: If you are at home, do not report to your worksite and contact your supervisor. You are highly encouraged to wear a face covering and to get tested by utilizing one of the drive thru sites operated by HCPH (<https://covidcheck.hctx.net/>) or any other testing site (hospital, pharmacy, etc.) that offers PCR testing. In order to protect County staff, any employee who is experiencing symptoms, regardless of vaccination status, should not be tested in an indoor site to reduce the spread. While you are waiting on the test results, you should isolate to prevent further spread.

If you are at work, you should immediately put on a face covering (if not already wearing one) and notify your supervisor. To prevent the spread to others including County employees, you may register to use one of the County employee testing drive thru sites or utilize one of drive thru sites run by HCPH (<https://covidcheck.hctx.net/>) or any other testing site (hospital, pharmacy, etc.) that offers PCR testing. While you are waiting on the test results, you should isolate to prevent potential further spread.

Exemptions

Q: Can employees request exemptions?

A: Employees can request a medical accommodation, religious exemption, or other exemption from the COVID-19 testing by completing and submitting a completed Request for Medical Accommodation or Religious Exemption form and submitting the form to their department's human resources liaisons.

Special Testing Considerations

Q: Can employees who are exposed to someone with a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 be tested at an employee HCPH testing site?

A: In order to protect County staff, any employee who is experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, should **not** be tested at a Harris County employee testing site and should instead seek testing at a Harris County drive-thru testing site, pharmacy, or through their medical provider.

If an employee is not fully-vaccinated and has been exposed to someone with a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19, they should be tested at an offsite testing site such as a Harris County drive-thru testing site, pharmacy, or other locations <https://publichealth.harriscountytexas.gov/Resources/2019-Novel-Coronavirus/COVID-19-Testing-Information> and not at one of the employee testing sites. Fully-vaccinated employees who are exposed to someone with COVID-19 and are without symptoms may still utilize the employee testing sites.

Q: What should departments do with COVID-19 test results?

A: Information regarding COVID-19 test results, COVID-19 vaccination status and requests for and approval of a medical or religious exemption obtained in the administration of this policy should be treated as confidential and should be kept separate from general personnel files. Access shall be on a need-to-know basis.