

SAFE OPENING OF HARRIS COUNTY COVID-19 EMPLOYEE TESTING POLICY

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to promote a safe and healthy workplace at Harris County for employees and visitors by conducting COVID-19 diagnostic testing of employees for the presence of SARS-CoV-2 to help mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

SCOPE

This policy applies to employees of (1) all departments under the direction of Commissioners Court and (2) the department of any elected or official appointed by other than Commissioners Court who chooses to adopt this policy.

DEFINITIONS

Employee: Any person who is an employee of Harris County or Harris County Flood Control District and works for (1) all departments under the direction of Commissioners Court and (2) the department of any elected or official appointed by other than Commissioners Court who chooses to adopt this policy.

Close Contact: Anyone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period (for example, three individual 5-minute exposures for a total of 15 minutes) or as may be defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Fully vaccinated: A person is considered fully vaccinated against the virus that causes COVID-19 as follows:

- (1) two weeks after their second dose in a 2-dose series, such as the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines;
- (2) two weeks after a single-dose vaccine, such as the Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine; or
- (3) as may be defined by the CDC.

Health care provider: For purposes of this policy, the term applies to a doctor of medicine, nurse practitioner or physician assistant who is authorized to practice under State law and who is performing within the scope of his/her practice as defined under State law. The phrase "authorized to practice in the State" as used in this section means that the provider must be authorized to diagnose and treat physical or mental health conditions.

Test, tested or testing: A polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test for COVID-19.

TESTING REQUIREMENTS

Departments will be responsible for ensuring all their employees get tested as required by the policy.

Weekly Testing: Employees shall be tested weekly and submit their diagnostic test result to their department's Human Resources weekly. Weekly testing should occur no earlier than 4-5 days after the previous test if not symptomatic.

Additional Testing: Employees should also obtain a test in accordance with CDC guidelines if symptomatic or exposed to COVID-19 by close contact.

Employees who are not fully vaccinated because they have a medical contraindication to vaccination are not exempted from the testing requirement.

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.

TESTING EXEMPTIONS

Fully Vaccinated

Fully vaccinated Employees who wish to be exempted from the weekly testing requirements set forth in this policy shall submit documentation of vaccination status through Harris County's Silver Sticker Program. Employees participating in the Silver Sticker Program are still subject to the "Additional Testing" set forth in this policy.

Medical and Religious Exemption

Employees unable to submit to COVID-19 testing with the frequency necessary to report tests results in the time frames required by this policy due to a medical or religious reason shall submit a request for a reasonable accommodation to Harris County Human Resources & Risk Management on forms approved by the HR Director.

Telework

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.

TESTING PROCEDURES

Harris County Public Health (HCPH) will provide dedicated sites for testing employees. To comply with testing requirements, employees can obtain COVID-19 testing through a HCPH site at no

cost or through another provider at the employee's own choice and cost. If the employee chooses to test at another provider, it must be a PCR test in order to comply with the testing policy.

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. Depending on daily registration counts, walk-ins and onsite registration may be accepted.

Time spent obtaining COVID-19 testing should be recorded as work time. The compensability of travel time will be governed by the Harris County Personnel Policies and Procedures. 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 time spent is considered reasonable by the employee's department head.

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.

Special Testing Considerations

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.

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 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).

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.

This policy will be effective beginning November 29, 2021 and will remain in effect until modification or cessation by Commissioners Court.