

Office of Human Resources

FAQs Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

OVERVIEW

This guidance document and FAQ have been developed to help RF campus representatives with planning and preparedness related to COVID-19 and to assist with responding to employee questions at their respective locations. As this is an evolving situation, information will be added as necessary.

The COVID-19 update on the RF homepage links to [SUNY's Health Alert](#) which provides essential resources and advisories from the Centers for Disease Control and state and local health departments.

We are here to support you. Should you have any questions, please contact your campus RF Human Resources Office.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

These are the areas that we are working on to provide assistance to employees. The following FAQs are designed to help answer questions and concerns that RF employees at your campus may have, and address issues that come up in the immediate future. The RF will continue to assess the situation and update guidance as things develop. RF staff should also be following campus directives regarding site closures and reporting to work. Please let us know if there are any additional issues that you would like to see addressed by Central Office.

NEW YORK STATE PHASED RE-ENTRY

Campus plans for research operations to return to the workplace should be in line with campus plans and the Governor's phased re-entry program. Here are some websites that provide useful information as you make re-entry plans.

[New York Forward](#)

[New York Forward Business Reopening Lookup Tool](#) (RF NAICS code is 541710)

[Industries Reopening by Phase](#)

[Office Safety Reopening Summary Guidelines](#)

[Office Safety Reopening Detailed Guidelines](#)

[Business Reopening Safety Plan Template](#)

[Regional Monitoring Dashboard](#)

[Empire State Development FAQ](#)

[OSHA Guidance on Preparing the workplace](#)

[CDC Considerations for Institutes of Higher Education](#)

NYS TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS – UPDATE AS OF JUNE 25, 2020

NYS has issued a travel advisory for individuals returning from travel to states that have a significant degree of community-wide spread of COVID-19. Certain employees may be subject to a 14-day quarantine if traveling to one of these states. If an employee voluntarily travels¹ to one of these states and is subject to the 14-day quarantine, the individual may not be eligible for Emergency COVID-19 Paid Sick Leave benefits. Please see the [travel advisory webpage](#) for more information and for a current list of states that are restricted. This page should be checked often as the list of states will be subject to change.

Please see the [NYS Department of Health Guidance](#) and the [NYS DOH Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information on quarantine restrictions.

WORK/EMPLOYMENT

Q1. Can I work from home in the event I am unable to come to work due to site closure or other issues related to COVID-19?

A. The determination of whether working remotely, alternate work hours and/or alternate work assignments are feasible for each individual employee is made on a case by case basis by managers and HR personnel at your campus. Decisions should take into account the technology available and/or means to do the work, and the ability to deliver a tangible work product related to the project or award the individual is paid from. Arrangements to work remotely, for alternate work hours and/or alternate work assignments are subject to change and may be reevaluated on a periodic basis.

Q2. How will my wages continue if I am unable to come to work for any reason related to COVID-19 and I am unable to work remotely or do an alternate work assignment?

A. The RF is implementing a temporary “COVID-19 expanded use of accrued sick leave program” during an emergency health situation such as COVID-19. This means that up to 22 full time equivalent days of accrued Paid Time Off (PTO) sick may be used when eligible employees must be out of work for reasons listed below. The RF will continue to monitor the situation closely and evaluate potential extensions to the 22-day period listed above. It is expected that remote work, alternate work hours and/or alternate work assignments will be evaluated as a first option and PTO sick or other appropriate PTO will be used as a second option. A combination of remote work and PTO may also be an option in the situations below.

- An employee is approved or directed by RF not to come to the work location due to issues related to COVID-19

¹ “Voluntary travel” does not include work-related travel.

- An employee is directed by a doctor not to come to work due to a high-risk health issue. If you are unable to get a health care professional's note, work with your HR office. Please remember there are also options for telemedicine which can be found [here](#).
- A school, day care or other special needs dependent care provider is closed and the employee needs to be home with their dependent
- An employee or their family member is subject to mandatory or precautionary order of quarantine/isolation issued by NYS, the Department of Health, a local health board, or any other governmental entity **and** has already exhausted the NYS Emergency COVID-19 Paid Sick leave.

Employees may also use other appropriate accrued PTO such as vacation, holiday, and personal time, in accordance with RF policies, for the reasons listed above.

Q3. I do not have a lot of PTO sick. Will I have to go unpaid if I am out of the office related to COVID-19 and unable to work remotely or complete an alternate work assignment?

A. If you are out due to mandatory or precautionary quarantine, see Emergency COVID-19 Paid Sick Leave below. For other reasons related to COVID-19, and unable to work remotely or complete and alternate work assignment, you may be eligible for continuation of salary and benefits as outlined in the [Salary Continuation Policy](#). Please discuss this with your supervisor and the RF Office of Human Resources at your location.

Q4. I am unable to work for reasons related to COVID-19 and do not accrue PTO, will my salary be continued?

A. The RF is concerned about the wellbeing of employees and will provide every opportunity to work remotely or have an alternate work assignment when possible. If you are absent due to quarantine order by a public health official, you are eligible for NYS emergency COVID-19 Paid Sick. You may be eligible for continuation of salary and benefits as outlined in the [Salary Continuation Policy](#). Please discuss with your supervisor and the RF Office of Human Resources at your location.

Emergency COVID-19 Paid Sick Leave

Q5. What is Emergency COVID-19 Paid Sick Leave?

A. To address the immediate need of employees affected by COVID-19 who are subject to mandatory or precautionary orders of quarantine or isolation, Governor Cuomo enacted a new law effective March 18, 2020, which provides paid sick leave benefits in certain situations. Under an update to this law from Governor Cuomo, employees who voluntarily travel (excluding work-related travel) to a restricted state as listed on the [travel advisory website](#) may not be eligible for Emergency Paid Sick Leave. Please see travel advisory section above.

Q6. What benefits can I use for a COVID-19 related quarantine?

A. If you are under an order of mandatory or precautionary quarantine issued by the State, New York State Department of Health, local Board of Health, or other authorized government entity you will be eligible for up to 14 calendar days of paid sick leave for a COVID-19-related quarantine, which should cover the period of mandatory or precautionary quarantine or order of isolation. [See Guidance for Obtaining an Order of Mandatory or Precautionary Quarantine.](#)

Q7. Am I required to use my existing sick leave accruals or other accruals (paid time off) for a COVID-19 quarantine order?

A. No, the up to 14 calendar days of PTO sick is in addition to any accruals you already have.

Q8. I am not currently eligible to accrue PTO sick, is this paid time available to me?

A. Yes, you will be given up to up to 14 calendar days PTO sick if you are under an order of mandatory or precautionary quarantine as described above. Please notify your campus HR office if you need to use this time.

Q9. Is my job protected during Emergency COVID-19 Paid Sick Leave for quarantine?

A. Yes, your job is protected during your leave and you are entitled to be restored to the position you held prior to taking leave.

Q10. What is the maximum pay I will receive for Emergency COVID-19 Paid Sick leave?

A. You are entitled to at least 14 calendar days of paid sick leave at your regular rate of pay.

Q11. What if I independently decide to quarantine – will I be eligible for Emergency COVID-19 Paid Sick leave?

A. No, this new law provides benefits in cases where an individual is under an **order** of quarantine – either mandatory or precautionary. Entities that may issue an “order” include the State of New York, New York State Department of Health, local Board of Health or any government entity authorized to issue such order. [See Guidance for Obtaining an Order of Mandatory or Precautionary Quarantine.](#) You may be eligible for expanded use of PTO sick (see 2nd question above)

Q12. I’m able to work from home but I’m under a mandatory or precautionary quarantine. Am I eligible for Emergency COVID-19 Paid Sick leave?

A. No, if you are not showing symptoms and are physically able to work through remote access or similar means (see question 1 above) you are not eligible for this benefit.

Q13. Is Emergency COVID-19 Paid Sick leave available retroactively?

A. Yes. You may take paid sick leave if you are still currently under an order of mandatory or precautionary quarantine or order of isolation issued by the State, department of health, local board

of health, or government entity even if that order was issued prior to the enactment of the COVID-19 quarantine leave (March 18, 2020).

New NYS Paid Family Leave COVID-19

Q14. If I am unable to work because my minor dependent child is subject to a quarantine order, what benefits are available to me?

A. If you have a minor dependent child under an order of mandatory or precautionary quarantine or isolation due to COVID-19, and you are covered under Paid Family Leave, you may apply for Paid Family Leave benefits by completing the [Request for COVID-19 Quarantine Leave for Minor Child package](#).

You will need to complete the employee sections on both forms in the package and send them to your campus HR/Benefits office along with your mandatory or precautionary quarantine or order of isolation. Your HR/Benefits office will complete the employer sections of the forms and submit all documentation to the insurance carrier. The insurance carrier must pay or deny your claim within 18 days.

Unemployment Benefits

Q15. If I am out of work (unpaid leave of absence or lay-off) due to COVID-19 closures, can I file a claim for unemployment insurance?

A. Yes, you may file a claim for unemployment insurance benefits by visiting the NYS Unemployment Insurance [website](#). The current maximum weekly benefit is \$504.00. NYS is currently waiving the 7-day waiting period for unemployment insurance benefits for individuals who are out of work due to COVID-19 closures. Eligibility for unemployment and benefit payment amounts are determined by the NYS Department of Labor.

Additionally, on March 27, 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) was passed. The CARES Act provides enhanced unemployment benefits, including larger benefit amounts of an additional \$600 per week until 7/31/2020 and availability for an additional 13 weeks of state unemployment benefits. More information can be found [here](#).

Other Employment Related

Q16. I travelled to an area impacted by COVID-19. Can I be asked by the RF not to come to my work location?

A. Yes. The safety and well being of the campus community is of utmost importance. In that regard, leadership at your work location may ask you not to return to avoid potential spread of the virus. For information and travel advisories see the [CDC website Information for Travel](#) and the [NYS Travel Advisory Website](#).

Q17. Is a quarantine the same as being directed to work from home?

A. No. Quarantine is a state, period or place of isolation where someone who has been exposed to infectious disease is placed. A mandatory quarantine is something that is ordered by an authorized government official. A self-quarantine may be recommended by a government official or health care provider if there is a chance you have been exposed. If you are asked to work from home by SUNY or the RF, you have no obligation to self-quarantine, unless otherwise directed by an authorized individual or body.

Q18. If I am asked not to report to my work location, but am not under quarantine from a public health official, will I be paid?

A. Your supervisor will determine if there is the ability to work remotely or complete an alternate work assignment. If that is not a possibility, you may use sick, vacation, holiday or personal PTO. (see above)

Q19. What if I voluntarily quarantine for 14 days for reasons unrelated to travel restrictions?

A. Your supervisor will determine if there is the ability to work remotely or complete an alternate work assignment. If that is not an option, you should use vacation, holiday, or personal PTO.

Q20. Will I still be paid if I can't work because of a personal illness or to care for family members?

A. If you are diagnosed with COVID-19, you can use NYS Emergency Sick Leave as outlined above. For other illnesses or to care for a family member, you can use PTO sick. In addition, Human Resources at your location will evaluate if you are eligible for Family Medical Leave or NYS Paid Family Leave.

Q21. What if school, daycare, or other dependent or special needs provider is closed and I need to stay home to care for my dependents?

A. Your supervisor will determine if there is the ability to work remotely or complete an alternate work assignment (see Question 1). If this is not a possibility, may use PTO sick leave (see Question 2). If you do not have accrued PTO sick, you may be eligible for salary continuation or New NYS Paid Family Leave benefits as discussed above.

Q22. If I am laid off for reasons related to COVID-19, am I guaranteed to get my job back?

A. While it is our goal to reinstate RF employees, we continue to reassess feasibility based on economic conditions, funding levels and business operational need.

Q23. If my office is closed, but I am still willing to work, will I be forced to use my Paid Time Off or go on unpaid leave?

A. Unless alternate work arrangements have been made by your manager/department in conjunction with Human Resources, you will either need to use your paid time off or go on unpaid leave. In addition, you may be eligible for salary continuation as outlined above.

Q24. Currently, I need a note from a physician if I am out of work for a personal illness for more than 5 days. Will I need a similar note if I am out because of COVID-19 illness?

A. We will follow established sick leave and disability policies. Therefore, you will need a note from a physician if you are out of work for more than 5 days due to personal illness. If you are unable to get a doctor's note due to reasons related to COVID-19 and want to come back to the office, please discuss with your HR department.

TIME REPORTING

Q25. I am out for reasons related to COVID-19. How do I complete my timecard?

A. Please see this [guidance](#) on how to complete your timecard for when absent for COVID related reasons.

BENEFITS

Q26. I am sick but can't get to the doctor. Is there another alternative?

A. Yes, Empire Blue Cross, CDPHP, MVP, Independent Health, and UMR (administrator of the Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Employee Health Plan) all offer telemedicine services. Telemedicine services allows individuals to meet with a board-certified doctor any time by live video. The doctor can discuss your medical and/or mental health history, review symptoms, recommend treatment, and prescribe medication if needed. Information on the telemedicine services and how to access them can be found [here](#).

Q27. What happens to all of my benefits while I am on unpaid leave (ex. Health insurance, retirement contributions, etc)?

A. In the event an RF employee must go on unpaid leave, employees will be able to continue health insurance coverage temporarily at the bi-weekly employee rate for up to 150 days to make health care continuation affordable. The RF will continue to monitor the situation closely and evaluate potential extensions to the 150-day period listed above. Employee's must experience an unpaid leave on or before December 31, 2020 to be eligible for the 150-days of benefit continuation. For specific details on employee contributions and benefit continuation, please see your campus HR/benefits representative.

NYS disability benefits and the optional short-term disability benefit (if enrolled) will cover a disability caused by a pandemic like any other. Similar to disabilities not caused by a pandemic, employees will be required to use their sick time before receiving disability payments.

Basic retirement plan contributions do not occur while an employee is out on unpaid leave; however, the time is counted towards vesting requirements.

Q28. What happens to all of my benefits if I am laid off (ex. Health insurance, retirement contributions, etc.)?

While health, dental and vision care coverage will terminate 28 days from your last day of employment, the RF is offering a special subsidized COBRA program for employees who are laid off on or before December 31, 2020. Employees who elect COBRA will be able to continue their health, dental and vision coverage for up to 150 days at the employee rate. For specific details on the special subsidized COBRA program including rates, please email benefits@rfsuny or call 518-434-7101.

All other benefits (life insurance, disability, etc.) cease on the last day of employment. If you are vested in the Basic Retirement Plan, contributions will cease with your last paycheck.

COMMUNICATION

Q29. How will I receive information while I am out of the office?

The RF will continue to work closely with SUNY System Administration to provide information and updates. The RF homepage links to SUNY's Health Alert which provides essential resources and advisories from the Centers for Disease Control and state and local health departments. This FAQ will be posted and updated on the RF's home page, Coronavirus Update-Information for Research Administrator's Page.

Q30. In the event of a site closure/quarantine/evacuation, what will happen?

The RF will follow the direction of local and state officials, as well as SUNY, in determining whether a site closure/quarantine or evacuation will occur at any of our locations.

PAYROLL

Q31. How will I receive my paycheck if I am out of work or the office is closed?

Direct deposit will be the easiest and quickest way to receive your earnings. If you are not currently enrolled, but are interested in direct deposit, please contact the RF Human Resources office on your campus. The RF will develop a plan to handle distributing paychecks to employees.

TRAVEL

Q32. Given the current uncertain travel climate, is it permissible to buy refundable tickets or incur some reasonable costs in the event travel plans get cancelled?

Under the current travel climate, refundable tickets are permissible if the additional cost is reasonable.

Q33. I am planning a business trip. Is trip cancellation insurance allowable?

RF policy allows for reimbursement for protection against changes in travel plans (e.g., airfare refundable insurance), provided it is reasonably cost beneficial.

PROCUREMENT

Q35. We need to make an emergency procurement. Do we need to follow competitive requirements as outlined in the RF procurement policy?

No, a sole source procurement can be utilized based on #2 below. The procurement should be fully documented to describe the situation.

When purchases qualify as Single Source procurement because of limited circumstances that justify procurement without open competition, one or more of the following circumstances apply: (1) The item is available only from a single source; (2) The public exigency or emergency for the requirement will not permit a delay resulting from competitive solicitation; (3) The awarding agency or pass-through entity expressly authorizes noncompetitive proposals in response to a written request; or (4) After solicitation of a number of sources, competition is determined inadequate.

Change History

DATE	CHANGE
March 18, 2020	Removed Campus Guidance Section
March 20, 2020	Added information on NYS Emergency COVID-19 Paid Sick Leave and New NYS Paid Family Leave for COVID-19; Added new Absence Reason
March 26	Added Unemployment information and how to complete timecards when using Emergency NYS COVID-19 Paid Sick Leave
April 6, 2020	Added information on RF policy for Continuation of Salary and Fringe Benefits; Removed information on advancing sick leave; Added information on Federal unemployment benefits
April 20, 2020	Changed benefits continuation at employee rate from 30 days to 60 days
May 22, 2020	Added information about re-entry and links to relevant websites
June 03, 2020	Added links to safety plan template and Re-entry Guidance
July 10, 2020	Updated document to add information on NYS COVID-19 Travel Advisory; updated benefits information regarding subsidized COBRA; Updated Time Reporting to link to web documents
August 26, 2020	Updated date for benefits continuation to December 31 2020.

