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.

WORK/EMPLOYMENT

Q. 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.

Q. 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 expansion of use of sick leave 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 that PTO sick or another type of accrual will be used if that is not available. A combination of remote work and PTO may also be an option in the situations below.

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

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

Q. 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 below. For other reasons related to COVID-19, the RF will advance up to 10 days of PTO sick to eligible exempt employees and 75 or 80 hours PTO sick to eligible non-exempt employees. Nonexempt workers whose shift exceeds these hours will have their normal biweekly hours advanced. This PTO is advanced even if you have other types of accruals. Any PTO sick that is advanced will be deducted from future accrued leave until the balance is repaid. You may choose to use another PTO type (e.g. holiday, vacation, personal) if you do not want to have a negative balance of PTO sick.

Emergency COVID-19 Paid Sick Leave

Q. 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.

Q. What benefits can I use for COVID-19 quarantine leave?
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.

Q. 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.

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

A. Yes, you will be given 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.

Q. Is my job protected during COVID-19 quarantine leave?

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.

Q. What is the maximum pay I will receive for COVID-19 quarantine leave?

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

Q. What if I independently decide to quarantine - can I take COVID-19 quarantine 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. You may be eligible for expanded use of PTO sick (see 2nd question above)

Q. I’m able to work from home but I’m under a mandatory or precautionary quarantine. Am I eligible for quarantine leave?

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

Q. Is quarantine leave available retroactively?
A. Yes. You may take quarantine 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**

**Q. 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**

**Q. 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.

There is Federal legislation currently pending which will provide pandemic unemployment assistance and extended benefits if passed. Additional information will be provided on those benefits when legislation is passed.

**Other Employment Related**

**Q. 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](#).

**Q. 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.

Q. 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)

Q. What if I voluntarily quarantine for 14 days?

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.

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

A. 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.

Q. 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 1st question above). If this is not a possibility, you can use appropriate paid time off (see 2nd question above). In addition, you may also be eligible for New Paid Family Leave benefits as discussed above.

Q. If I am out on paid or unpaid leave, am I guaranteed to get my job back when I am able to return to work?

A. Yes, employees who are on unpaid leave for reasons related to COVID-19 (and whose appointment continues after the unpaid leave period) will be reinstated to their former position or an equivalent position with equivalent pay, benefits, and other terms and conditions of appointment.

Q. 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. The RF is closely monitoring wage relief initiatives that are being proposed on the federal and state level and advocating with government officials on behalf of RF employees.

**Q.** 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.

**Q.** 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 as described above, you are eligible for NYS emergency COVID-19 Paid Sick, NYS Disability, and NYS Paid Family Leave. The RF is closely monitoring other wage relief initiatives that are being proposed on the federal and state level and advocating with government officials on behalf of RF employees. Things are developing very quickly, and we will notify employees of all wage continuation options available to them and update this FAQ document accordingly.

**Q.** I am using NYS Emergency COVID-19 Paid Sick Leave. How do I complete my timecard?

**A.** Employees should enter Non Worked Time as the Hours Type in the e-time reporting system. Then select COVID-19: NYS Quarantine (Non Worked).

**Q.** I am using expanded PTO sick for issues related to COVID-19 as outlined in the 2nd question of the FAQ. How do I complete my timecard?

**A.** There are three new absence reasons in the e-time reporting system – COVID-19: Employee Illness, COVID-19: Other Related. Please use applicable reasons when completing your time card and using PTO sick or recording Non-worked time for absences related to COVID-19.

**BENEFITS**

**Q.** I am sick but can’t get to the doctor. Is there another alternative?

**A.** Yes, Empire Blue Cross, CDPHP, MVP and Independent Health all offer telemedicine services. Telemedicine services will be available with UMR (administrator of the Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Employee Health Plan) effective April 1, 2020. 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.

Q. 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 30 days to make health care continuation affordable. The RF will continue to monitor the situation closely and evaluate potential extensions to the 30-day period listed above. 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.

COMMUNICATION

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

A. 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.

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

A. 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

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

A. 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

Q. 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?

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

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

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

PROCUREMENT

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

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

A. 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

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 18, 2020</td>
<td>Removed Campus Guidance Section</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 20, 2020</td>
<td>Added information on NYS Emergency COVID-19 Paid Sick Leave and New NYS Paid Family Leave for COVID-19; Added new Absence Reason</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 26</td>
<td>Added Unemployment information and how to complete time cards when using Emergency NYS COVID-19 Paid Sick Leave</td>
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