



NFFE Update on Coronavirus

May 14, 2020

Attached is the latest USDA guidance on PPE as offices move into reopening. We still do not have the USDA Reopening plan, but as we move toward reopening, you REALLY need to look at these two items:

- **White House Plan:** <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Guidelines-for-Opening-Up-America-Again.pdf>
- **OMB/OPM Plan for Fed Agencies:** <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/M-20-23.pdf>

I have gotten a lot of questions about at-risk individuals and what happens now. Below are some key items from these two plans.

Workplaces should not start reopening, unless the state or county meets the gating criteria (from White House Plan):

The guidelines incorporate gating criteria which must be met in a state or county (in addition to core preparedness responsibilities) before proceeding to the phased reopening process:

- 1) Influenza-like illnesses and covid-like cases of illness must trend downward for 14 days;
- 2) Documented COVID-19 cases and prevalence of positive tests must trend downward for 14 days (while not decreasing the overall number of tests); and,
- 3) Local hospitals must have the capacity to treat all patients without crisis care and jurisdictions must have a robust healthcare worker testing program and plan in place.

The workplace must have these in place to even START opening (From White House Plan and OPM/OMB):

- 1) Policies for social distancing and protective equipment, temperature checks, testing, isolating, and contact tracing, sanitation, use and disinfection of common and high-traffic areas, Business travel.
- 2) Monitor workforce for indicative symptoms. Do not allow symptomatic people to physically return to work until cleared by a medical provider.
- 3) Develop and implement policies and procedures for workforce contact tracing following employee COVID+ test.

And until full regular operation is resumed (From OMB/OPM):

“Until agencies have resumed normal operations and risk is minimal, all Federal agencies are encouraged to maximize telework flexibilities to all eligible workers within those populations that the CDC has identified as being at higher risk for serious complications from COVID-19 (CDC High Risk Complications) and to CDC-identified special populations including pregnant women (CDC Special Populations), regardless of location.”

NOTE that the attached document from USDA states that the USDA Plan will be coming out shortly, but apparently, mask availability will be part of the plan. The way I see it, wearing a mask for ALL interactions is a change in working conditions ...

*“As USDA begins its reopening process, USDA Mission Areas and Offices will have paper and/or cloth masks available to all employees until that Mission Area or O Office reaches its 100 percent reopening status as defined by USDA’s soon-to-be-released playbook. While Mission Areas and O offices are expected to have masks available for all employees, employees who wish to use their own personal mask are able to do so if that is the employee’s preference. **Masks are to be used by all employees partaking in any in-person human interactions until 100 percent reopening is achieved.**”*

Melissa Baumann, PhD
President, NFFE Forest Service Council

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United States Department of Agriculture
Office of the Deputy Secretary Washington, D.C. 20250

May 13, 2020

***COVID-19 Guidance Personal Protective Equipment Procurement Including Masks and Face Coverings
(Updated from April 9, 2020 Guidance titled COVID-19 Guidance Masks and Face Coverings)***

USDA takes the health and safety of our workforce, stakeholders, and customers very seriously. In preparation for reopening offices, in accordance with White House Guidelines on [Opening Up America Again](#) and [Office of Management and Budget Memo M-20-23](#), the Department is issuing the following guidance aimed at protecting the safety and health of employees who may be performing their duties in-person back at their worksite under USDA's soon-to-be released Playbook and reopening criteria. This guidance enables Mission Areas and O Offices¹ to procure the cleaning and personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies they may need to reopen. The guidance, outlined below, overrides the USDA Guidance issued on April 9, 2020 titled *COVID-19 Guidance Masks and Face Coverings*.

As USDA makes plans to resume normal operations under a phased reopening, many Mission Areas and agencies have already been working to purchase cleaning supplies as part of their planning. The PPE to be used in office settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain are face coverings.

The Department is directing the following actions aimed at protecting the safety and health of our employees as we plan for a reopening posture:

General Reopening Mask Policy

As USDA begins its reopening process, USDA Mission Areas and O Offices will have paper and/or cloth masks available to all employees until that Mission Area or O Office reaches its 100 percent reopening status as defined by USDA's soon-to-be-released playbook. While Mission Areas and O offices are expected to have masks available for all employees, employees who wish to use their own personal mask are able to do so if that is the employee's preference. Masks are to be used by all employees partaking in any in-person human interactions until 100 percent reopening is achieved.

Paper and cloth masks have become more widely available on the market, and therefore, effective immediately, USDA authorizes all Mission Areas and O Offices to begin procuring masks in advance as we begin the reopening process. Effective immediately Mission Areas and O Offices are authorized to procure paper and/or cloth masks. While a strong preference should be placed on cloth masks given their longer usage and durability, Mission Areas may purchase paper and/or cloth masks based on lowest cost and availability while ensuring sound inventory management. Purchase cards are allowed for mask purchasing. Mandatory sources should be used, if available. However, if unavailable, local manufacturers may be a good source if they accept the government purchase card.

If mask delivery is the only barrier to reopening an office, the Department has a limited supply of cloth masks available that can be used until mask orders are received. Should your Mission Area or O Office need temporary access to the Departmental supply please contact Maureen Gardner at maureen.gardner@usda.gov (requesting access to these masks does not guarantee you will receive them, the Department will continue to prioritize our mask supply on the highest need).

¹ The "O Offices" for the purposes of this memorandum are defined as: the Office of the Chief Financial Officer, Departmental Administration, Office of Budget and Program Analysis, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of the Chief Economist, Office of the General Counsel, Office of the Chief Information Officer, and the Office of Communications.

Should your Mission Area or O Office have trouble procuring masks, Chief Operating Officers (COOs) should contact Tiffany Taylor at TiffanyJ.Taylor@usda.gov, and she can share a list of potential suppliers. At this time, most Mission Areas are prohibited from using or procuring N-95 masks (with a few exceptions outlined below). **The Department will supply masks in the National Capital Region (NCR) for employees at Whitten, South, Yates, One Thomas Circle, PP3, and GWCC. Mission Areas and O offices located outside of the NCR/locations which are not explicitly listed above are responsible to procure their own masks. Agencies that are collocated should collaborate on orders as feasible.**

Use of N-95 Masks

Given the shortage in the supply chain of N-95 masks only those Mission Areas and employees whose job functions regularly and in non-pandemic situations require the use of N95 masks will be permitted to use and procure N-95 masks. Those positions are outlined below.

- USDA's Forest Service (FS) positions include: Law Enforcement & Investigations, Fire, Emergency Medical Services, and other frontline personnel who are required to wear N95 masks per Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and CDC guidelines and for which no other lower classes of masks are permissible.
- USDA's Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) positions include: Plant fumigation workers, Southern border workers with chemical exposure, and other high-risk workers covered by a respiratory protection program.
- No other USDA Mission Areas aside from FS or MRP are authorized to use or procure N-95 masks unless further guidance is issued by USDA.

Mask Reimbursement Policy

In USDA's April 9th Guidance, USDA authorized Mission Areas and O Offices to allow for a one-time reimbursement of up to \$50 with a receipt to employees who are mission-essential and required to perform their duties in person at their worksite. Due to increased paper and cloth mask availability in the supply chain, this reimbursement policy will be discontinued effective May 31, 2020, at which time this reimbursement will no longer be authorized. Receipts must be submitted by June 15, 2020 and must be dated before June 1, 2020. Receipts submitted after June 15th will not be reimbursed.

Cleaning Supplies and Gloves

Mission Areas and O Offices should continue to procure gloves and cleaning supplies to ensure an adequate supply to meet guidelines in accordance with the reopening playbook. Purchase cards are allowed for cleaning supply purchases. Mandatory sources should be used, however if unavailable, local manufacturers may be a good source if they accept the government purchase card. If Mission Areas and O Offices have challenges procuring these items, COOs should elevate this to Tiffany Taylor at TiffanyJ.Taylor@usda.gov

Supplies needed for Mission Areas and O Offices residing in buildings maintained by GSA or another federal agency should be coordinated with the building management.

Inventory Management

Mission Area and O Office Chiefs of Staff and COOs will oversee inventory as well as prioritize and manage their mask and cleaning supplies and their deployment following Departmental guidance. Chiefs of Staff and COOs should provide periodic updates on usage and remaining inventory to OCP as requested.

Questions?

Purchase cardholders or contracting officers with procurement questions should work with their Purchase Card Coordinators or Mission Area Senior Contracting Officials. Mission Area COOs and O Offices heads may contact Tiffany Taylor at TiffanyJ.Taylor@usda.gov with contracting questions. Mission Area COO, Agencies and O Office staff with questions on this guidance or to access USDA's limited supply of masks should contact Maureen Gardner at maureen.gardner@usda.gov.