



Guidance for Continuing State Operations in Response to COVID-19

The Georgia Department of Administrative Services was charged by Governor Brian P. Kemp in Executive Order 05.12.20.02 with promulgating guidance for the reopening of state offices and the return of teleworking state employees to in-office environments. Accordingly, this document provides the framework for agencies to transition back to normal operations. Answers to Frequently Asked Questions regarding returning to the worksite can be found in Appendix B of this document.

Returning employees to the workplace during and after the novel coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic requires a phased and thoughtful approach that continues to prioritize safety and promotes efficiency and service to customers. Advance planning by agencies at this stage is critical. The details of each agency's Onsite Re-entry Plan will likely differ and depend on the agency's individual business operations, but this document provides general guidance and a high-level framework for fully resuming on-site workplace operations. Agencies should continue to monitor all COVID-19 related guidance from state and federal authorities and consult with counsel as appropriate for guidance specific to their business operations.¹ See Appendix A for helpful links to COVID-19 Resources. Guidance for continuing state operations in response to COVID-19 includes three goals:

1. Protect the health of the State's workforce and Georgia's citizens
2. Provide efficient and effective government services
3. Develop sustainable workforce practices to promote long-term health and safety

Goal 1: Protect the Health of the State's Workforce and Georgia's Citizens

Strategies for Personnel:

- Communicate the importance of following social distancing and other safety guidelines to employees.
- Communicate clearly and consistently with employees who are returning to onsite work about the safety measures that have been taken (including what PPE is available and/or required to be worn), proper use of PPE, and workplace safety best practices for limiting exposure.

¹Subsequent Executive Order(s) may supersede guidance contained in this document.

- Require all employees reporting to a worksite to notify the agency if the employee is considered to have been in close contact of a person with a positive COVID-19 diagnosis per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Georgia Department of Public Health Guidelines.
- Agencies may conduct employee medical screenings to the extent permissible by law².
- Allow flexibility in the use of leave including Families First Coronavirus Response Act benefits where applicable.
- Agencies should follow the Georgia Department of Public Health's recommendations for employees returning to a worksite who have been diagnosed with COVID-19³.
- Encourage employees to report any safety and health concerns to their supervisor.

Strategies for Operations:

- Implement a phased approach that maximizes service delivery and customer needs.
- Continue to maximize teleworking opportunities for eligible staff.
- Prioritize remote communication services over in-person meetings.
 - Continued in-person operations should follow the guidance for in-person critical infrastructure operation provided in Section V. of Executive Order 05.12.20.02 regarding measures to mitigate the exposure and spread of COVID-19.
- Limit the number of in-office staff through staggered work shifts.
- Increase physical space between workers' worksites/workspaces to at least six feet, erect barriers between workspaces, and advise employees to maintain social distancing.
- Convert hallways and stairways one-way where possible and limit the number of elevator passengers where appropriate.
- Agency Specific:
 - Any state managed or operated Restaurants & Dining Services, and Food Establishments, as defined by GA. Comp. R. & Regs. R. 40-7-1-.02, should follow the respective guidance for such facilities provided in Sections IV and V of Executive Order 05.12.20.02.
 - Any agency providing childcare should comply with the guidance for such service as provided in Section VII of Executive Order 05.12.20.02 along with all requirements for critical infrastructure.
 - Any state managed or operated gyms should follow the guidance for such facilities as provided in Section V of Executive Order 05.12.20.02 along with all requirements for non-critical infrastructure.

² According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) COVID-19 guidance, employers may measure employees' body temperature. However, employers should be aware that some people with COVID-19 do not have a fever. Any such requirement should be applied consistently among all similarly situated employees. Any results from such a test should be stored in a confidential medical file separate from the employee's personnel file. A log of such temperature check results may also be kept so long as it is maintained in a confidential manner. EEOC guidance related to COVID-19 can be found here:

<https://www.eeoc.gov/coronavirus/>

³ The CDC and Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) recommendations were updated to discourage test-based return to work strategies. The current recommendation is to use time-based and symptoms-based strategies. See DPH guidance at this link:

<https://dph.georgia.gov/document/document/dph-covid-19-return-work-guidance-after-covid-19-illness-or-exposure-persons-not/download>

Strategies for Sanitation:

- Sanitize and deep clean the workplace prior to employees returning per CDC guidelines.
- Enhance sanitation through increased cleaning intervals.
- Provide personal protective equipment (PPE) as available and appropriate to the function and location of the worker within the business location.
- Provide disinfectant products for workers to clean their workspace, equipment, and tools.
- Minimize the sharing of equipment and reduce gatherings in communal areas such as break rooms.

Goal 2: Provide Efficient and Effective Government Services

Strategies for Service Continuity:

- Evaluate existing staffing patterns to leverage online presence and call center services to respond to customer inquiries.
- Extend office hours for government services to allow for alternating or lower staffed shifts while maintaining service levels and social distancing guidelines.
- Establish hours for appointments where appropriate to manage occupancy and social distancing guidelines.
- The number of individuals inside agency facilities should not exceed 50% of fire capacity occupancy or eight (8) patrons per 1,000 square feet.
- Encourage non-cash payments when possible.
- Inform customers and contractors of any changes in operations necessary for service continuity.

Strategies for Customer Safety:

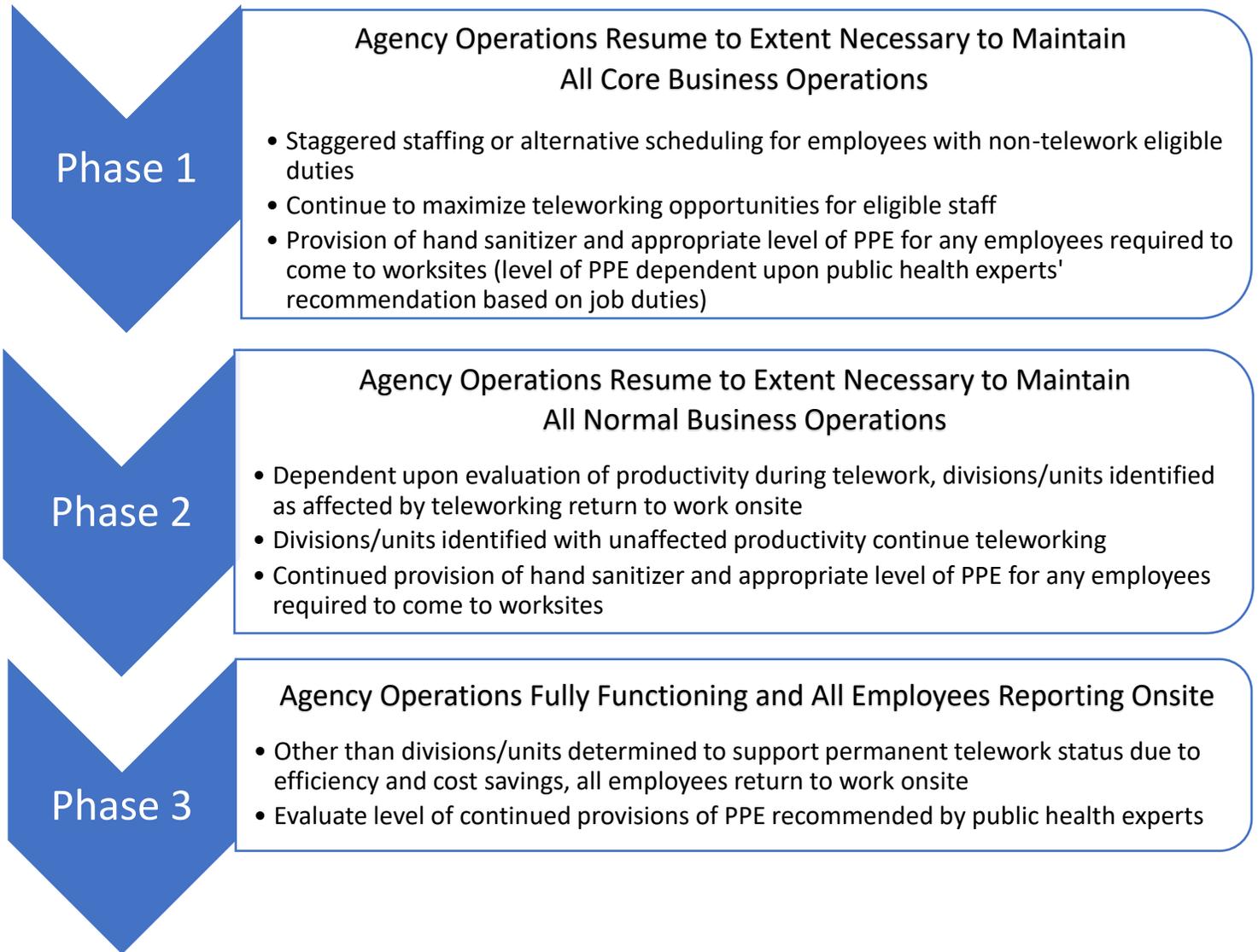
- Encourage patrons to use hand sanitizer upon entering agency facilities and provide additional hand sanitizer within the public areas of the facility.
- Sanitize entrance and exit doors as recommended if patrons are expected to visit the agency facility.
- Provide customers with disposable masks as determined appropriate and where supplies permit.
- Install protective screens or other mitigation measures where worker-customer interactions are likely.

Goal 3: Develop Sustainable Workforce Practices to Promote Long Term Health and Safety

- Evaluate performing in-person regulatory functions after regular business hours to increase social distancing.
- Develop and/or expand online opportunities to conduct business with the state to reduce or eliminate the need for certain in-person services.
- Evaluate technology needs to maximize continued teleworking opportunities while reducing the need to operate and to maintain physical space.
- Evaluate the need for a regular ordering and replenishment schedule of PPE based on ongoing or long-term health and safety needs.
- Encourage staff to pursue online training and peer networking opportunities in lieu of in-person travel, training, or conferences.
- Evaluate the continued need to limit staff travel to essential agency functions.

Onsite Re-Entry Phased Approach

Agencies should consider a phased approach to returning to normal business operations based on their customer and business needs.



INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING WORK STATUS OF EMPLOYEES

- Employers should evaluate business operations and determine priorities for returning employees to the workplace.
- Employees in telework status may continue to do so in the initial reentry phase if the employee desires to continue teleworking and their presence at the worksite is not required for a business activity that has resumed. Consider allowing employees with proven telework productivity to continue to do so while there is a continued risk of exposure.
- Provide employees who are ineligible for telework status due to the nature of their duties and required to return to onsite work with PPE as available and appropriate to the job function and to the extent necessary for business activities that have resumed. Employers should conduct an assessment to determine which employees to prioritize returning to work. See Goal 1 strategies for the health of employees returning to onsite work.
 - **Note:** Some employees who are ineligible for telework status due to the nature of their duties may not be required to return to onsite work because those duties are not in support of a business operation that has resumed. See Employee Leave Options below for handling such employees' work status.
 - **Note:** Employees (full and part time) who return to work with temporarily reduced hours may be eligible for partial unemployment benefits. Such partial unemployment claims must be filed by the agency. An emergency rule issued by the Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL) permits employees to receive \$300.00 per week without reducing the amount eligible to be received under partial unemployment claims. Information on how employers must file employer-filed partial claims and resources can be found on the GDOL webpage at www.gdol.ga.gov.

EMPLOYEE LEAVE OPTIONS

- The following options are available for employees who are ineligible for telework status due to the nature of their duties, and who are not required to return to the workplace because their duties are not in support of a business operation that has resumed.
 - Receipt of emergency closure pay⁴ if the worksite or work function is not resumed only to the extent that delegated authority to agency heads for such emergency closures remains in effect;
 - Use of accrued annual or personal leave or compensatory time (if eligible); or
 - Authorized leave without pay. **Note:** An employee may be eligible for partial unemployment benefits if absence is due to a lack of work (see information above under Initial Considerations).
- Employees who refuse to return to work after being requested to do so have the following pay status options:

⁴ Delegated authority to agency heads for emergency closures is currently in effect through May 15, 2020.

- Accrued annual or personal leave or compensatory time (if eligible)
 - **Note:** State Personnel Board Rule 478-1-.16, *Absence from Work*, provides discretion to employers to approve such leave dependent upon business needs. In order to ensure consistency of process, legal counsel should be consulted regarding denials of employee leave requests.
- Authorized leave without pay
- An employee's refusal to return to work due to fear of exposure is not a qualifying reason to take leave provided for under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA). However, employees may be eligible for leave if they do have a qualifying reason (see guidance on FFCRA leave)⁵. See qualifying reasons under the FFCRA here:

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcra-employee-paid-leave>

- Employers may have a duty to engage in dialogue with employees who may be at higher risk if they contract COVID-19 and should consider special accommodations for personnel who may be part of a vulnerable population. Some employees may request a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to not return to work due to an underlying condition which makes them more vulnerable to COVID-19 or a mental health condition exacerbated by COVID-19. Employers may:
 - ask questions to determine whether the condition is a disability;
 - discuss with the employee how the requested accommodation would assist him or her and enable the employee to keep working;
 - explore alternative accommodations that may effectively meet his or her needs; and/or,
 - request medical documentation if needed.

Remember that employers do not have to grant the specific reasonable accommodation requested by the employee and may explore options other than leave.

MORE INFORMATION

Thank you for your efforts to adapt to the new environment presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Please note that the guidance contained in this document is not all-inclusive of the factors agencies may need to consider as they begin to transition employees back onsite. As additional information and public health recommendations become available, agency policies and procedures may need to be updated to ensure the highest levels of safety for our employees and customers. The Georgia Department of Administrative Services will continue to provide information and resources over the coming weeks to assist with the Onsite Re-Entry process. Please direct any related questions to policy@doas.ga.gov.

⁵ FFCRA leave is available through 12/31/2020.

Appendix A – Helpful Links

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

- Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>
- Interim Guidance on Management of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Correctional and Detention Facilities: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/correction-detention/guidance-correctional-detention.html>
- People Who Are at Higher Risk for Severe Illness: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>
- Implementation of Mitigation Strategies for Communities with Local COVID-19 Transmission: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/community-mitigation-strategy.pdf>
- Health Promotion Materials: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/materials.html>
- How to Safely Wear and Take Off a Cloth Face Covering: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/cloth-face-covering.pdf>
- When and How to Wash Your Hands: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>
- Cleaning and Disinfecting : <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)

- Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19: <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

- EEOC Coronavirus Information Page: <https://www.eeoc.gov/coronavirus>
- EEOC What You Should Know About COVID-19 and EEO Laws: <https://www.eeoc.gov/wysk/what-you-should-know-about-covid-19-and-ada-rehabilitation-act-and-other-eeo-laws>

State of Georgia Resources

- Georgia Department of Public Health COVID-19 Resources: <https://dph.georgia.gov/>
- Georgia Department of Public Health Return to Work Guidance: <https://dph.georgia.gov/document/document/dph-covid-19-return-work-guidance-after-covid-19-illness-or-exposure-persons-not/download>
- Georgia Department of Administrative Services Human Resources Administration COVID-19 Response Resources: <http://doas.ga.gov/human-resources-administration/human-resources-administration-covid-19-response>
- Georgia Building Authority Updates: <https://gba.georgia.gov/updates-regarding-covid-19>

Appendix B – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. **Will there be a set date that agencies will need to have all employees back in the office?**

No. Agencies have different core functions and responsibilities and therefore should establish a phased approach timed to balance the needs and safety of their customers and employees. Agencies may begin phasing teleworking employees back onsite on May 18, 2020.

2. **Will the state coordinate purchase of masks and hand sanitizer at the enterprise level?**

Yes. Each agency will receive a survey from DOAS State Purchasing Division where they will be asked to indicate quantity of masks and hand sanitizer needed for *initial* reopening. Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency (GEMA) will make masks and hand sanitizer available to agencies as requested, as available supplies permit. Specific instructions will follow to agencies upon completion of the survey.

3. **Who will be responsible for agency sanitation on Capitol Hill and state offices?**

Georgia Building Authority (GBA) is responsible for disinfection services for Capitol Hill locations (procedures to follow). GBA will provide additional disinfectant and hand sanitizer for agencies upon request for intermittent cleanings, employee workstations, and various other office locations as needed. Agencies should still take efforts to follow and encourage employees to adhere to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for routinely cleaning frequently touched objects and surfaces such as workstations, doorknobs, keyboards, and telephones.

Agencies occupying non-GBA office locations are responsible for the sanitation of their worksites, in cooperation with their respective property management companies.

GBA Tenant Services can be contacted at 404-463-4357 for requests.

4. **Are employees required to wear masks?**

Generally, no, it is not a requirement. Agencies should adhere to CDC guidelines and strongly encourage employees to wear masks as appropriate. Agencies should prioritize any PPE including masks for those employees executing business operations that are customer facing but should implement procedures to limit face-to-face interaction.

5. **Are agencies allowed to require customers to wear PPE, such as masks and gloves?**

Generally, no. Agencies should implement procedures that adhere to CDC guidelines and promote opportunities for customer interaction that limits close interaction.

6. Are agencies allowed to offer masks to customers?

Agencies should develop procedures that balance COVID-19 re-entry operations with both employee and customer safety.

7. Will teleworking be a permanent status?

Agencies may establish telework programs in accordance with the state's Telework Policy when it is determined to benefit the agency. An agency establishing a telework program must apply criteria and procedures of such program consistently throughout the agency. Agencies should provide sufficient instruction to teleworkers and supervisors to ensure both parties are capable of maintaining a successful telework arrangement. It is the responsibility of each agency to determine the specific criteria under which eligibility determinations will be made. Not all employees and positions may be suitable for telework.

8. What should employers communicate to employees about safety considerations?

Prior to returning employees to their onsite office locations, agencies are encouraged to provide best practice instructions to employees on public health guidance (see helpful links in Appendix A), agency specific guidelines, and information about agency sanitation procedures. To the extent possible, the agency should allow employees an opportunity to ask questions.

9. What is GBA doing to increase safety in state owned and operated buildings?

- Assigned maintenance teams to begin fogging Capitol Hill and Two Peachtree with a non-toxic hypochlorous solution to provide a broad level of disinfectant to limit potential exposure in all areas;
- Added janitorial staff members/contractors who are dedicated to cleaning and disinfecting high contact surfaces and other areas prone to contamination;
- Increased the number of hand sanitation stations in all facilities;
- Will provide additional hand sanitizer and disinfectant to agencies upon request;
- Increased the number of public trash cans;
- Increased the intake of outside air in all buildings to reduce potential exposure with recycled air;
- Will provide directional signage and limit capacity in elevators to minimize potential exposure and encourage social distancing; and
- Will provide thermal imaging cameras at select locations on Capitol Hill