

Executive Order on Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask-Wearing

Dear DOL Colleagues,

I want to thank you for your ongoing service during the pandemic. We recognize that the pandemic has brought unparalleled challenges. Many of you have shouldered additional responsibilities caring for loved ones, community members, and families — all while working tirelessly in support of the Department's mission. As the country continues to respond to COVID-19, we want to emphasize our commitment to protecting your health and safety, and to supporting you during these challenging times.

Last week, President Biden signed Executive Order 13991 on Protecting the Federal Workforce and Requiring Mask-Wearing. In this order, the President has directed all agencies to take steps to protect federal workers — including by requiring compliance with CDC guidelines requiring the use of masks, physical distancing, and other public health measures.

Effective immediately, Federal employees, onsite contractors, and all visitors to DOL buildings must wear a mask (also called a face covering) that covers the nose and mouth, and is in accordance with current CDC and OSHA guidance:

- Appropriate masks must be worn consistently. Masks must be worn in common areas or shared workspaces (including open floorplan office space, cubicle embankments, and conference rooms). Exceptions may be granted consistent with CDC guidelines, for example when an individual is alone in a room or office with floor to ceiling walls and a closed door, completely alone in a workspace, or for a limited time when eating or drinking and maintaining at least 6 feet of distance in accordance with CDC guidelines.
- Masks must fit properly (snugly around the nose and chin with no large gaps around the sides of the face).
- Novelty/non-protective masks, including neck gaiters and bandanas, masks with ventilation valves, or face shields as a substitute for masks, will not be permitted.
- To the extent practicable, individuals will maintain distance of at least six feet from others at all times, including in offices, conference rooms, and all other communal and work spaces. It is also important to note that the use of masks is not a substitute for physical distancing practices.
- Virtual meetings must be employed wherever possible, even for employees in the same worksite.

Wearing masks may be difficult for some people with sensory, cognitive, behavioral or other medical issues. If DOL employees and on-site contractors are unable to wear a mask properly or cannot tolerate a mask, they are encouraged to notify their supervisor and OASAM's Civil Rights Center and discuss whether telework or other appropriate arrangements should be considered. People who are deaf or hard of hearing may rely on reading lips and may have difficulty communicating while wearing a mask. If so, they may consider wearing a clear mask or a cloth mask with a clear panel. Alternatively, ensuring written communication, closed captioning, or decreasing background noise to make communication possible while wearing a mask that blocks lips should be considered. Accommodations will be made for individuals in accordance with existing Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC) guidance. It is important to

note that masks are different than personal protective equipment (PPE, such as surgical or N95 respirator masks) as defined by OSHA. If such PPE is needed by a DOL employee to perform their duties, it will be provided by the agency just as it would be in a non-pandemic environment.

DOL will enforce mask policies in all DOL-controlled spaces whether owned or leased. Signs or notices will be posted prominently at the entrances to DOL controlled spaces to inform employees and visitors of the requirement. **Individuals not wearing appropriate masks will be denied entry to DOL-controlled spaces.**

As previously noted, the Department is pursuing efforts now to update our own COVID-19 protocols, and anticipates issuing additional guidance in the coming weeks.

In addition to these safety measures, we encourage all managers and supervisors to continue to maximize the use of telework. Agencies should continue to make available other flexibilities for use by DOL employees to help sustain their work day while managing their dependent care responsibilities. These flexibilities include, but are not limited to: alternative and compressed work schedules, expanded work bands, mid-day flex, and Emergency Back-Up Dependent Care services. A comprehensive list of these [flexibilities](#) can be found on LaborNet.

Thank you for your commitment to the Department and your tireless work during this challenging period. We appreciate your service to our nation, and all you are doing to keep each other and your communities safe.

Al Stewart

Acting Secretary

U.S. Department of Labor

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