



Mobile County
PUBLIC SCHOOLS



EMPLOYEE GUIDE TO COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Welcome to the 2020-21 school year! Superintendent Chresal Threadgill and the Board of School Commissioners of Mobile County are proud to lead the largest workforce in Mobile County - a group of 8,000 talented employees who all play a role in the success of 55,000 students. Despite the challenges presented by COVID-19, Mobile County Public Schools (MCPSS) will do everything possible to ensure the safety of our students and employees while enabling our students to continue their education.

All employees are expected to work when scheduled and be able to perform the essential functions of their roles. Consistent with current policies and to the extent possible, MCPSS and its representatives will make every effort to provide assistance to those employees who have medical or personal concerns, as appropriate.

All employees are urged to take basic preventative measures to prepare themselves and their families to avoid exposure to or infection by the virus causing COVID-19. These steps include cleaning your hands often, avoiding close contact with people who are sick, staying home if you are sick, covering coughs and sneezes, wearing a face mask and cleaning/disinfecting frequently touched surfaces daily. [Click here](#) to review a summary of basic preventative measures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

PREVENTION OF COVID-19

HEALTHY HABITS TO HELP PREVENT THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention-treatment.html>



Avoid close contact.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick. If you are sick, keep your distance from others.



Clean your hands.

Washing your hands often for 20 seconds will help protect you from germs. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol based hand rub with at least 60% Ethyl Alcohol.



Stay home when you are sick.

Stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick to prevent spreading your illness to others.



Practice other good health habits.

Use regular household cleaning spray or wipe to clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces at home, work or school.



Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.



Follow CDC's recommendations for using a facemask.

CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask. Facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of the coronavirus to help prevent the spread of the disease to others.



Cover your mouth and nose.

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing to prevent those around you from getting sick.

Importance of Social Distancing

MCPSS expects all employees to adhere to social distancing guidelines. The CDC states that limiting close face-to-face contact with others is the best way to reduce the spread of COVID-19. "Social distancing" means keeping a safe space (at least 6 feet) between yourself and other people.

Social distancing should be practiced in combination with other everyday preventative actions to reduce the spread of COVID-19, including wearing masks or face coverings, not touching your face with unwashed hands, and frequently washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

Masks and Face Coverings

All employees will be required to wear cloth face coverings/masks or face shields. Employees who are unable to wear a mask or face covering due to a medical condition or other protected reason should communicate with Human Resources about the possibility of an accommodation. However, masks should be worn until an accommodation is granted. Note that wearing a mask does not replace the need for physical or social distancing.

For more information, please see the CDC's [Considerations for Wearing Masks](#) and the Alabama Department of Public Health's [Safer at Home Masks FAQ](#).

SYMPTOMS AND DIAGNOSIS OF COVID-19



Symptoms

Symptoms of the virus causing COVID-19 can include fever or feeling feverish/chills, cough and shortness of breath. At this time, the CDC believes that symptoms may appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 days after exposure.

What if I am sick?

Employees exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms while at work must immediately notify their supervisor and leave the premises. Employees who exhibit symptoms while at home should remain at home and notify their supervisor. The employees may only return to work once they satisfy the return to work criteria detailed in this newsletter. While away from work, employees may be eligible for FFCRA leave, regular leave and/or unpaid leave. FFCRA leave is available if you are symptomatic and seeking a test or awaiting test results, are under quarantine, or are under doctor's orders. FFCRA is available for 10 days only, after which regular or unpaid leave must be used. Submit regular or unpaid leave requests through Frontline. Employees should seek medical guidance for any medical concerns they have.

Employees who are sick with a non-COVID-19 illness may use their regular leave accruals until such time as they are able to return to work.

What if I am diagnosed with COVID-19?

If you are diagnosed with COVID-19 (positive test result or diagnosed by doctor), our protocols require that you quarantine for 10 days from the date of the COVID-19 test. Please do not report to work until you meet the return to work criteria outlined herein. Notify your supervisor and electronically submit a copy of the completed [MCPSS FFCRA Leave Request Form](#). FFCRA leave is available if you are symptomatic and seeking a test or awaiting test results, are under quarantine, or are under doctor's orders. Please attach a copy of your quarantine order, doctor's instructions and/or a copy of the positive COVID-19 test result to the leave form.

What if someone in my house is diagnosed with COVID-19?

If you live in the same household with someone that is diagnosed with COVID-19, our protocols require that you quarantine for 14 days. Please do not report to work until you meet the return to work criteria. Notify your supervisor and electronically submit a copy of the completed [MCPSS FFCRA Leave Request Form](#). FFCRA leave is available if you are symptomatic and seeking a test or awaiting test results, are under quarantine, or are under doctor's orders. Please attach a copy of your quarantine order, doctor's instructions or, if possible, a copy of the positive COVID-19 test.

What if I have been in close contact with someone with a confirmed diagnosis?

Close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of someone with a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes. If you are in close contact, as defined, our protocols require that you quarantine for 14 days. Please do not report to work until you meet the return to work criteria outlined on the next page. Notify your supervisor and electronically submit a copy of the completed [MCPSS FFCRA Leave Request Form](#). Please attach a copy of your quarantine order, doctor's instructions or, if possible, a copy of the positive COVID-19 test.



QUARANTINING AND RETURNING TO WORK

When do I need to Quarantine?

Employees should self-isolate/quarantine in the following circumstances:

- An employee who is directed by a medical provider must quarantine per doctor's orders. A doctor's note will be required.
- An employee who tests positive for COVID must quarantine for 10 days from the date of the positive test, not the date the results are received. A doctor's note or copy of the positive test is required.
- An employee who comes in close contact with a person with a confirmed COVID diagnosis or who lives in the same household with a person with a confirmed COVID diagnosis must quarantine for 14 days. A doctor's note or copy of the positive test for the member of the same household will be required.
- An employee who undergoes a COVID test must quarantine until results are received. Proof of the test will be required.

Return to Work Criteria

An employee who was diagnosed with COVID-19, or otherwise quarantined for a close contact, may not return to work unless they meet all of the following qualifications:

- The employee completes a quarantine for 10 days (diagnosis) or 14 days (close contact) from the date of the positive test.
- The employee is asymptomatic (i.e. fever free, without medication) for three days.
- The employee should provide a doctor's note confirming the employee is able to return to work or a negative COVID-19 test. An employee who is unable to provide a doctor's note or negative test should consult with their HR Representative.

TAKING LEAVE DUE TO COVID-19

COVID Leave

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (“FFCRA”) provides paid leave to eligible employees impacted by COVID-19. There are two types of leave available: Emergency Paid Sick Leave (“EPSL”) and Expanded Family and Medical Leave (“EXFMLA”). [Click here](#) to view a poster published by the Department of Labor that provides more information about these leave options. [Click here](#) to view information from the Department of Labor guidance on the FFCRA leave.

Employees who wish to utilize FFCRA leave should submit a [MCPSS FFCRA Leave Request Form](#). This form should be completed in its entirety and submitted to the timekeeper for your school or department. Copies of any quarantine orders or positive tests should be attached to the MCPSS FFCRA leave form. Questions about FFCRA leave should be directed to the [HR Representative](#) who serves your school.

For more information, please see the FFCRA Leave Frequently Asked Questions document on pages 8-10 of this guide.

Regular Leave Accruals

Employees may elect to use regular leave accruals at any time, provided the correct justification for the desired leave has been met. Normal leave accruals may also be used, in some instances, to supplement the paid leave under the FFCRA. Normal restrictions apply to the use of regular leave accruals. Please see the Board Policy manual and Employee Handbook for more information.

- **Personal Leave:** All full-time employees, teachers and support personnel, are granted two days of personal leave annually, except as follows: New employees starting work after December 31st will receive only one personal leave day for that year; and employees starting work after March 31st will receive no personal leave days for that year. If not used by the attendance reporting date for the June 30th payroll, annual personal leave days automatically convert to sick leave.
- **Accrued Sick Leave:** Accumulated Sick Days for full-time employees shall accumulate at the rate of one day per month for each month of regular employment during the year. Sick Days provide a day’s pay when employees are unable to work because of illness or injury for themselves or an immediate family member. Accumulated Sick Days are not to be used as vacation or personal leave. Using Accumulated Sick Days for anything other than your sickness or that of a family member is a violation of state law and Board policy and may be considered fraud.
- **Vacation/Annual Leave:** All full-time 12 month employees will receive Annual Leave (vacation) days based on the number of months worked during the year. Annual leave is earned on an accrual basis. It is not awarded in advance of time worked.

TAKING LEAVE DUE TO COVID-19, continued

Family and Medical Leave

Under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), eligible employees are entitled to a total of up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave during any 12-month period for the following purposes:

- A serious health condition of the employee that makes the employee unable to perform the essential functions of his or her position
- The care of a spouse, child, or parent of the employee who has a serious health condition
- The birth of a son or daughter of the employee and the care of such son or daughter
- The placement of a son or daughter with the employee for adoption or foster care.

FMLA leave is available to an employee in addition to regular leave accruals such as vacation time or paid sick leave. Under certain conditions, an employee may use the 12 weeks of FMLA leave intermittently. An employee may elect to substitute annual leave or sick leave, consistent with applicable laws and regulations, for any unpaid leave under the FMLA. An employee must provide notice of his or her intent to take FMLA leave, not less than 30 days before leave is to begin or, in emergencies, as soon as is practicable. MCPSS may request medical certification for FMLA leave taken to care for an employee's spouse, son, daughter, or parent who has a serious health condition or for the serious health condition of the employee. An employee or family member who contracts a quarantinable communicable disease, such as COVID19, and becomes ill would generally be considered to have a qualifying serious health condition. MCPSS may require medical certification of a serious health condition. The [Medical Leave of Absence Packet](#) is available in the HR Forms Library at MCPSS.com

Please note that Expanded Family and Medical Leave ("EXFMLA") under the FFCRA referenced under COVID-19 leave above is considered FMLA leave but is paid at the rate established by law. EXFMLA leave is only available to employees who must provide childcare for children whose schools or day cares are physically closed due to COVID-19, or whose regular childcare is unavailable due to COVID-19.

Sick Leave Bank

The Sick Leave Bank (SLB) was established according to Alabama Code, Sections 16-22-9 and 16-1-18.1, to help employees during the financial pinch of lost work due to illness or injury. Any full-time or part-time employee who receives Accumulated Sick Days as a benefit is eligible to join the SLB. Membership is optional and requires only two days to be deposited in the bank. These days will be returned once the employee resigns from the bank.

An employee shall be allowed to borrow (owe) no more than 15 days from the bank. However, employees, at their discretion, may donate their own days to a specific employee who is suffering a catastrophic illness. In order to receive or donate days, both employees (beneficiary and donating) must be members of the Sick Leave Bank. State law provides that no employee may donate more than 30 days to any one employee.

For more information, please see:

- [Sick Leave Bank Application for Loan and/or Donated Days](#)
- [SLB Catastrophic Sick Leave Transfer Authorization](#)

ACCOMMODATIONS AND SPECIAL CONSIDERATION

Accommodations

Employees with a disability and who are otherwise qualified under the Americans with Disabilities Act may request an accommodation to help them address their concerns with reporting to work.

Supervisors may not prevent an employee from returning to work based solely on the supervisor's belief that the employee falls into the CDC's categories of individuals at higher risk for severe complications from COVID-19. Employees who have an underlying medical condition, or those who are pregnant, may submit an MCPSS ADA Reasonable Accommodation form including a request for Personal Protective Equipment or other reasonable accommodation.

High Risk Employees

An employee considered at higher risk for severe complications from COVID-19 may request an unpaid leave of absence, or may use vacation or personal leave.

Employees Caring for Family Members

Employees who regularly care for a family member who is at higher risk for severe complications from COVID-19 may be eligible for time off under the Family and Medical Leave Act. FFCRA leave may be available if the family member is suffering from COVID-19.

Requests to Work From Home

No supervisor has the authority to approve any employee working from home.

Safeguarding Employees' Health

As a precautionary measure, daily disinfection practices are being implemented within all high traffic common areas. Students are starting the school year using at-home, remote learning, and visitors to MCPSS facilities are restricted. Employees have undergone COVID-19 training. MCPSS is requiring social distancing and masks.

Employee Assistance Program

MCPSS has an Employee Assistance Program available to all employees and their dependents. The EAP program is a confidential service available for employees who experience problems which may eventually affect their employment. The EAP Program assists by offering referrals to experts who can assist in a variety of areas, including professional counseling services. The Employee Assistance Program is administered by Bayview Associates (251-450-2250). Additional contact information for assistance providers is listed in the Employee Resources section below.

Expectations for Employees

All employees are asked to adhere to all CDC, State of Alabama and Mobile County Health Department and MCPSS orders, guidelines, policies and procedures at all times.

Personal Activities

All employees are asked to follow CDC and health department guidance outside of work to minimize the potential spread of COVID-19 to themselves, their coworkers and others.

Visitors

MCPSS is restricting access to schools and other system facilities. Visitors may only access certain limited areas (i.e. Human Resources). Visitors wishing to visit other areas must obtain advanced permission. All visitors are required to strictly adhere to all health and safety precautions, including the use of cloth face coverings/masks and social distancing.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **Am I required to disclose whether or not I am feeling ill or experiencing COVID-19 symptoms to management?**

Yes. MCPSS is committed to maintaining a safe and healthy work environment. Employees experiencing symptoms that could potentially be associated with COVID-19 are directed to disclose this information to their supervisor immediately. Given concerns about COVID-19, employees are asked to stay at home if they are feeling ill, to avoid placing their co-workers (and eventually students) at risk. Employees who are at work and begin to feel ill should disclose this information to their supervisor and go home immediately.

- **How do I apply for leave under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act?**

By submitting a completed MCPSS FFCRA Leave Request Form to your timekeeper. Please note that for qualifying reasons 2 through 4, you will need to provide a copy of the relevant doctor's note or positive COVID-19 test. If you are quarantining due to a member of your household or close contact testing positive for COVID-19, please obtain this person's written permission before submitting a copy of their positive COVID-19 test.

- **How much will I get paid if I take FFCRA Leave?**

Emergency Paid Sick Leave (EPSL) of up to two weeks (10 work days) paid at 100% for qualifying reasons 1 to 3 and capped at \$511 per day. EPSL is paid at 2/3 of the employee's daily rate of pay and capped at \$200 per day for qualifying reasons 4, 5 and 6. EPSL may be taken intermittently but is only available for up to 80 hours per employee.

Expanded Family Medical Leave (EXFMLA) is available for qualifying reason 5. The first two weeks are unpaid, although the employee may take EPSL for the first two weeks of EXFMLA leave. The remaining EXFMLA leave is paid at 2/3 of the employee's daily rate of pay and is capped at \$200 per day. The maximum amount of EXFMLA leave available is 12 weeks and the leave available is reduced by any FMLA leave taken in the 12 months prior to the EXFMLA leave request.

- **Can I use EPSL or EXFMLA leave to care for my father who is recovering from a stroke?**

No, FFCRA leave is only available for the qualifying reasons identified in the law. Certain regular leave accruals or unpaid leave would need to be used for any non-COVID-19 related reason.

- **Can I use EPSL or EXFMLA leave to care for a family member who is considered high risk for complications from COVID-19?**

No, FFCRA leave is only available for the qualifying reasons identified in the law. Certain regular leave accruals or unpaid leave would need to be used for any non-COVID-19 related reason.

- **My child's school is giving me a choice between having my child attend in person or participate in a remote learning program for the fall. I signed up for the remote learning alternative because, for example, I worry that my child might contract COVID-19 and bring it home to the family. Since my child will be at home, may I take paid leave under the FFCRA in these circumstances?**

No, you are not eligible to take paid leave under the FFCRA because your child's school is not "closed" due to COVID-19 related reasons; it is open for your child to attend. FFCRA leave is not available to take care of a child whose school is open for in-person attendance. If your child is home not because his or her school is closed, but because you have chosen for the child to remain home, you are not entitled to FFCRA paid leave. However, if, because of COVID-19, your child is under a quarantine order or has been advised by a health care provider to self-isolate or self-quarantine, you may be eligible to take paid leave to care for him or her.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS, continued

- **Can I use my regular leave accruals to make up for the difference in the pay I receive while on FFCRA leave?**

Yes, your regular leave accrual could be used to bring your pay up to 100 percent of the wages. This is referred to as a “true-up” although the rules are different for Emergency Paid Sick Leave and Expanded Family and Medical Leave. However, sick leave may not always be used to true up EXFMLA leave taken because Alabama law specifies very specific reasons that sick leave may be taken. A school closure due to a pandemic is not included in those reasons. If your child is sick and still qualifies for EXFMLA, then you may use sick leave to true up your wages.

- **How much EXFMLA leave is available?**

Up to 12 weeks. EXFMLA is just another form of FMLA leave and the Family and Medical Leave Act limits an employee to 12 weeks during the year. FMLA leave taken in the last 12 months prior to your EXFMLA leave request will reduce the total amount of EXFMLA leave available to you. Similarly, EXFMLA leave taken will reduce the amount of FMLA leave available to you in the applicable FMLA year.

- **Is all of my EXFMLA leave considered paid leave?**

The first two weeks of EXFMLA leave is unpaid under the FFCRA. However, EPSL leave, if it is not already exhausted, is eligible to be used for the first two weeks. So, if you have not already taken EPSL leave, and qualify for EXFMLA leave, the first two weeks will be considered EPSL leave and paid at the rates authorized by statute. Remaining EXFMLA leave available will be paid at the rates authorized by the FFCRA.

- **I went for a COVID-19 test. May I return to work?**

Not until you receive your results. If you test positive, you will have to quarantine and meet the Return to Work criteria in order to return to work.

- **Do I have to take FFCRA Leave?**

No, FFCRA leave is available for your use, but you may always elect to use your regular leave accruals or take unpaid leave. Please keep in mind that Emergency Paid Sick Leave (“EPSL”) does not impact or reduce your regular leave accruals.

- **If I were to take an unpaid leave of absence, could I continue my health care coverage and if so, how?**

An employee on FMLA leave pays just their normal monthly deductible. Once FMLA expires, the employee must sign up for COBRA coverage. The cost for family COBRA coverage is \$1,365 per month and the cost for an individual is \$547 per month. To request a leave of absence, you must complete and submit the [MCPSS LOA \(Medical\) Request](#).

- **Is there an option to Telework?**

As of August 1, 2020, subject to any applicable laws and regulations, a teleworking option is not being offered.

- **What leave is available to an employee if the FFCRA leave is insufficient?**

An employee may use regular leave accruals, if appropriate. The employee may also be able to borrow days from the Sick Leave Bank, if they are a member.

- **How often is EPSL available?**

EPSL leave of up to ten days or 80 hours is available to an employee. It may be taken intermittently, but once the 80 hours is exhausted, the employee is no longer eligible for EPSL leave.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS, continued

- **Is regular FMLA leave paid leave?**

No, only leave available under the FFCRA is paid leave. Remember this EXFMLA leave is only available to care for a child whose school or daycare is closed, or whose childcare provider is unavailable due to COVID-19, and is paid at 2/3 of the employee's regular salary up to a maximum of \$200 per day.

- **When do I have to quarantine?**

An employee should self-isolate / quarantine in the following circumstances:

- As directed by a medical provider. A doctor's note will be required.
- An employee who tests positive for COVID must quarantine for 10 days from the date of the positive test, not the date the results are received. A doctor's note or copy of the positive test is required.
- An employee who comes in close contact with a person with a confirmed COVID diagnosis or who lives in the same household with a person with a confirmed COVID diagnosis must quarantine for 14 days. A doctor's note or copy of the positive test for the member of the same household will be required. Close Contact is defined as being within six feet for at least 15 minutes.
- An employee who undergoes a COVID test must quarantine until results are received. Proof of the test will be required.

- **I passed someone in the hall who later tested positive for COVID-19. Do I have to quarantine?**

It depends. If you were in close contact with the individual, then under MCPSS protocols, you would have to quarantine for 14 days. Close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of someone with a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes. If you merely passed the individual in the hall way, then you do not have to quarantine.

- **After I have quarantined, when can I return to work and what must I provide?**

An employee who was diagnosed with COVID-19 or quarantined due to a close contact may not return to work unless:

- The employee quarantines for the appropriate period of time; and,
- The employee is asymptomatic (i.e. fever free, without meds) for three days.
- The employee should provide a doctor's note confirming their ability to return to work or a negative COVID-19 test.
- If the employee is unable to provide either of these documents, they should communicate with their HR Representative.



RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYEES

[Healthy Habits to Prevent COVID-19](#)

[CDC's Considerations for Wearing Masks](#)

[Alabama Department of Public Health's Safer at Home Masks FAQ](#)

[HR Representatives School and Department List](#)

<https://mcpss.sharepoint.com/sites/HR2020>

[Mobile County Health Department's List of COVID-19 Testing Sites](#)

Employee Assistance Program

- Bayview Professional Associates: 251-450-2250
- Helpline: 251-431-5111
- Mobile Mental Health Center: 251-473-4423
- Alcoholics Anonymous: 251-438-1679
- Ala-Teen: 251-341-8998
- Drug Education Council: 251-433-5456
- Consumer Credit Counseling: 251-602-0011
- Debt Counseling of Mobile: 251-433-2488

IMPORTANT NOTE

The plan is based on current CDC guidelines and Governor's orders. Please understand there is a possibility that changes / revisions will be made as CDC guidelines or Governor's orders change.