These frequently asked questions (FAQs) are applicable to all departments that report directly to the Fulton County Manager. It is highly recommended that elected officials, who are appointing authorities or department heads that report directly to a Board, follow these parameters and/or contact the Department of Human Resources Management (DHRM) and/or County Attorney’s office for guidance, if they seek to implement a protocol inconsistent with these guidelines. These FAQs are subject to change as the COVID-19 situation develops. The County reserves the right to rescind or modify this guidance at any time.

A. WHAT IS THE CORONAVIRUS OR COVID-19

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a novel coronavirus that was first identified during an investigation into an outbreak in Wuhan, China. Some limited person-to-person transmission has been reported in countries outside China, including the United States. By comparison, other respiratory illnesses such as seasonal influenza, are currently widespread in many US communities.

B. COVID-19 RELATED ABSENCES

Effective Saturday March 14, 2020, Fulton County is establishing a temporary leave bank to further support our employees during this difficult and uncertain time. The leave, which will be coded as COVID19ADMIN, will be exclusively for COVID-19–related absences will not accrue, and unused leave will not roll over to the next calendar year. Permanent employees will be entitled to use up to 80 hours (or 10 work days) of leave and non-permanent employees will be entitled to use up to 58 hours (or 10 work days), which may only be used for the following reasons:

- The employee is exhibiting symptoms of acute respiratory illness (i.e., fever of 100.4° F or greater, cough or shortness of breath) or has been diagnosed with a presumptive or confirmed positive case of COVID-19;
- The employee has come into prolonged close contact as defined by guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and/or the Fulton County Board of Health (FCBOH) with someone with a presumptive or confirmed positive case of COVID-19;
- The employee is the parent or legal guardian of a child whose school is closed for a COVID-19 related reason and the employee needs to be absent from work to care for or supervise the child;
- The employee has traveled to one of the countries that have a Level 3 Travel Health Notice (e.g., China, Iran, South Korea, Italy and other specified European countries) within the last 14 calendar days; and/or
- The employee is the caretaker of a household member who must practice social distancing due to a COVID-19 diagnosis or prolonged close contact with someone with a presumptive or confirmed positive case of COVID-19.

This leave may only be granted to an employee if telecommuting is not a viable option. An employee who needs to remain away from work beyond the 10 days of COVID19ADMIN leave may request to use their accrued leave (i.e., sick leave, compensatory leave, vacation leave, and holiday earned, in that order). Fulton County reserves the right to request documentation to substantiate the basis for using this leave at a future time.
1. If the worksite is closed due to an outbreak of COVID-19, will employees be placed on administrative leave (authorized absence from duty)?

   It depends on whether the employee has been designated as “Non-essential;” “Essential Emergency;” or “Standard Essential.” Administrative leave, an authorized absence from duty without loss of pay or charge to accrued leave, is appropriate where a “Non-essential” employee is prevented from working due to the County’s action (e.g., office closure) and the employee is not able to work from home or at another alternative worksite. “Essential Emergency” employees are required to report to or remain at their assigned work site or an alternative Fulton County work site regardless of weather or other emergency conditions. “Standard Essential” employees may be required to be on-call or to work remotely during an office closure.

2. I have come into close contact with an individual with a presumptive or confirmed positive case of COVID-19. Am I required to stay at home?

   Yes. We are asking any employee who has been exposed to COVID-19, even if asymptomatic, to remain at home. If you have the ability to telework, you will be required to telecommute. Effective Saturday March 14, 2020, any employee who is unable to telecommute may utilize COVID-19ADMIN leave. An employee who needs to remain away from work beyond the 10 work days of COVID-19ADMIN leave may request to use their accrued leave (i.e., sick leave, compensatory leave, vacation leave, and holiday leave, in that order). Fulton County reserves the right to request documentation to substantiate the basis for using this leave at a future time.

3. If I am caring for someone with COVID-19, who qualifies as a family member under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), can I also inquire about FMLA protection?

   Yes, you can contact the County’s third party vendor, Sedgwick, at 888-436-9530 or via the company’s employee portal at timeoff.sedgwick.com, to determine your eligibility and qualification for leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Any supervisor who becomes aware of this type of situation, which could be a qualifying event under the FMLA, is obligated to contact Sedgwick to request that an FMLA packet be sent to the employee.

4. My child’s school is closed due to COVID-19? Am I expected to report to work? If so, can I bring my child to work?

   You will not be permitted to bring your child to work; however, you also are not expected to report to work during the closure. If you have the ability to telework during this time, you will be required to telecommute during the closure. Effective Saturday March 14, 2020, any employee who is unable to telecommute may utilize COVID-19ADMIN leave. Fulton County reserves the right to request documentation to corroborate the basis for such leave at a future time.

5. I was absent from work because my child’s school was closed between March 10 and 13, 2020 due to a COVID-19-related event. Will I have to use my vacation leave to cover my absence?

   No, any employee who was absent during this time period as a result of a school closure will be granted administrative leave. Fulton County reserves the right to request documentation to substantiate the basis for your absence at a future time.
C. EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

1. Should I report to work if I am experiencing any of the symptoms related to COVID-19 (i.e., fever, cough or shortness of breath)?

Any employee who is experiencing any of the three main symptoms of COVID-19 (i.e., fever of 100.4°F or greater, cough or shortness of breath) is strongly encouraged, out of an abundance of caution, to remain at home rather than report to work. Effective Saturday March 14, 2020, an employee may utilize COVID19ADMIN leave during this time. Pursuant to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance, an employee should remain at home until he or she has been free of symptoms for at least 24 hours without the use of symptom-masking medications such as ibuprofen, acetaminophen or cough suppressants.

2. If an employee comes to work and shows symptoms of respiratory illness, what should the supervisor do? May the employee be placed on administrative leave (authorized absence from duty), and if so, for how long? What is needed before the employee can return to work?

Any employee exhibiting symptoms of acute respiratory illness (i.e., fever of 100.4°F or greater, cough or shortness of breath) should be isolated and should immediately consult with the Department of Human Resources Management and/or the County Attorney's Office. Employees with the ability to telework may be required to telecommute. Effective Saturday March 14, 2020, any employee who is unable to telecommute may utilize COVID19ADMIN leave.

Consistent with generally applicable County policy, an employee may be required, as a condition of returning to work, to obtain and present certification from the employee's health care provider that the employee is able to resume work and can safely perform the essential functions of the employee's job. Before an employee returns to work, the department should consult with the Department of Human Resources Management and/or the County Attorney's Office concerning County policy on requesting medical documentation from an employee returning from leave.

3. Can a department mandate an employee exposed to COVID-19 remain at home for a specified period?

Yes, the CDC, Georgia Department of Public Health or other health agency will provide information related to the length of time an individual remains contagious, as well as current recommendations for social distancing, etc. Generally, a department should not prohibit an employee from reporting to work unless it has evidence or a reasonable concern that an employee is physically unable to perform his or her job, or their presence in the workplace poses a risk of infection to others. If the employee has the ability to telecommute, that option should be explored prior to considering any leave options.

4. Under what circumstances should a department communicate to its employees that there is a confirmed case among one or more of its employees (without identifying the person/specific office)?

The infected employee's privacy should be protected to the greatest extent possible; therefore, his or her identity should not be disclosed. In an outbreak of COVID-19, management should share only that information determined to be necessary to protect the health of the employees in the workplace. If social distancing, information sharing, or other precautions to assist employees in recognizing symptoms or reducing the spread of the illness can be taken without disclosing information related to a specific employee, that is the preferred approach.
5. Can an employee refuse to show up to work for fear of contracting COVID-19?

Given that there are no suspected or confirmed affected cases at any Fulton County worksite at this time, there is not an objectively reasonable basis for any employee to refuse to show up to work for fear of contracting COVID-19. However, in an effort to exercise flexibility and support our employees during this difficult time, Fulton County may permit employees to telecommute as appropriate in accordance with the Telecommuting Policy and Procedure (335-16). If telecommuting is not a viable option, Fulton County may permit an employee to take leave without pay for up to 7 business days. Absent extraordinary circumstances, failure to report to work for 4 or more business days following the leave without pay period would result in dismissal for job abandonment in accordance with the Separations Policy and Procedure (330-19). Employees are still required to follow Fulton County and departmental protocols for reporting absences.

6. Will Fulton County require an employee who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 to undergo a medical evaluation prior to returning to work?

It is possible that an employee may be required to undergo a fitness for duty evaluation prior to returning to work. Fulton County’s Fitness for Duty Policy and Procedure (312-16) authorizes a fitness for duty examination following an employee’s return from leave when the County has a reasonable belief the employee may pose a direct threat to his/her safety or the safety of others due to a medical condition.

D. QUESTIONS ABOUT PREVIOUS TRAVEL

1. Can my department ask me about my personal travel or future travel plans?

It is permissible for a department to ask an employee whether the employee has traveled to high-risk areas (i.e., countries for which the Centers for Disease Control has issued Level 3 Travel Health Notice - China, Iran, South Korea, Italy and other specified European countries) or whether the employee has future plans to do so.

2. What if I recently traveled to an area affected by COVID-19?

Fulton County is requesting that any employee who has traveled to any of the countries that have a Level 3 Travel Health Notice (i.e., China, Iran, Italy, South Korea) within the last 14 calendar days, take the following actions:
   
a. Self-Identify – Please contact your department head and/or HR Liaison before attempting to return to work to let them know that you recently have traveled to an area with widespread, ongoing community spread of COVID-19; and

   b. Provide proof of travel to an area of widespread, ongoing community spread of COVID-19.

You may be asked to telecommute if you have the ability to do so. Any employee who is unable to telecommute may utilize the leave specifically allotted to employees for COVID-19 related absences. An employee who needs to remain away from work beyond the 10 work days of COVID19ADMIN leave may request to use their accrued leave (i.e., sick leave, compensatory leave, vacation leave, and holiday leave, in that order). Fulton County reserves the right to request documentation to substantiate the basis for using this leave at a future time.
3. Can my department ban me from personal travel to areas affected by COVID-19?

No, a department generally cannot forbid an employee from traveling to an affected area outside of work. It is perfectly fine, however, for a department to recommend that employees avoid personal travel to those areas. It is recommended that prior to scheduling personal travel, employees visit the CDC website which provides up-to-date information about Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) for travelers and travel related industries. You may use the following link to access the site: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html

4. I am scheduled to participate in County-sponsored out of state travel to a conference in the next three months, what should I do?

Due to Fulton County Government’s commitment to employee safety in light of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak, effective immediately, all nonessential out of state business travel will be suspended until further notice. Fulton County will continue to monitor the situation and provide guidance as more information on the extent and severity of the outbreak becomes available. If nonessential business travel has already been booked, please work with your department’s travel coordinator to cancel and properly receive an airfare and hotel refund or credit if applicable. If you decide to travel on your own to the non-essential training, you will not be reimbursed by the County. This guidance currently does not impact any in-state travel and/or training.

E. EXPECTATIONS FOR ESSENTIAL EMPLOYEES

1. As an employee, how do I know if my position is designated as an operationally “Essential” employee?

Department Heads will determine which employees are needed to maintain essential services when Fulton County offices and facilities are closed. Department Heads will ensure that employees know whether they are considered “Essential” or “Non-essential” personnel. Essential Employees should know their status prior to an event. Check with your supervisor, department head or the Department of Human Resources Management if you are uncertain of your status.

2. I have been designated by my department head as an “Essential” employee. County offices are closed due to a COVID-19 event, but I am required to report to work. Will I be compensated for working?

An employee deemed essential will be designated as either “Essential Emergency” or “Standard Essential.” “Essential Emergency” employees are required to report to or remain at their assigned work site or an alternative Fulton County work site regardless of weather or other emergency conditions. “Essential Emergency” employees are not eligible to telework during a declared state of emergency and/or unexpected office closure. “Standard Essential” employees may be required to be on-call or to work remotely during inclement weather or emergency situations.

“Emergency Essential” employees are compensated at their regular rate of pay. In addition, any “Emergency Essential” employee who reports to work during an office closure will receive accrued leave banked as “holiday earned” at a rate of 1.5 for each hour actually worked. “Standard Essential” employees who work remotely during an office closure will be compensated at their regular rate of pay. In addition, any “Standard Essential” employee who performs work during an office closure will receive accrued leave banked as “holiday earned” at a rate of 1.0 for each hour worked.
3. I have been designated by my department head as an “Essential” employee. County offices are closed due to a COVID-19 event, but I am required to be on call. Will I be compensated for being on call?

Employees will be compensated for their on-call/call-in time in accordance with the On-Call Pay Policy and Procedure (107-16). On-call employees shall be paid at their normal rate of pay for any time actually worked while on-call. In addition, any on-call employee who performs work during an office closure will receive accrued leave banked as “holiday earned” at a rate of 1.0 for each hour actually worked. Employees will be paid any applicable overtime rate if the time actually spent carrying out assigned duties during the call-in time qualifies as overtime hours. Employees who are not required to perform any work during their on-call shift will be paid $2.50 per hour.

4. What will the county do if an “Essential” employee is demonstrating symptoms of acute respiratory illness and/or compromised health -- should they be removed from Essential Employee List?

Yes, any employee who is experiencing any of the three main symptoms of COVID-19 (i.e., fever of 100.4°F or greater, cough or shortness of breath) is strongly encouraged, out of an abundance of caution, to remain at home rather than report to work. The employee should be removed from the Essential Employee List and should remain at home until he or she has been free of symptoms for at least 24 hours without the use of symptom-masking medications such as ibuprofen, acetaminophen or cough suppressants. The employee may utilize the leave specifically allotted to employees for COVID-19 related absences.

Any question not specifically addressed herein should be directed to the Department of Human Resources Management.