



Dear Colleagues,

This week we find ourselves in the midst of quite a bit of change around the agency with respect to COVID-19 and our operations. This includes the issuance of new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force. In addition, we continue to take our next steps in our phased approach to increasing our physical presence in our facilities.

Late last week, the CDC released [COVID-19 Community Levels](#), a new tool to help communities decide what prevention steps to take based on the latest data. The current state of the pandemic has changed dramatically from the fall of 2020 when the prior criteria were established. For example, CDC has [noted](#) that with current high levels of vaccination and high levels of population immunity from both vaccination and infections, the risk of hospitalization and death from COVID-19 is greatly reduced for most people. The new COVID-19 Community Level indicators include hospital admissions and the percent of inpatient beds that are occupied by COVID patients, in addition to new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people. These criteria together represent the potential for the impact of serious COVID-19 illness on people and the healthcare system. If you are interested in reading more about [CDC's decision-making process](#), you can download their presentation.

Along with the rest of the federal family, on Monday, March 7, EPA will start implementing the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force's [initial implementation guidance](#) on [COVID-19 Community Levels](#), which addresses mask wearing and screening testing of unvaccinated employees (summarized in the chart below). We expect further guidance in the coming weeks from CDC and the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force on other safety measures. Until then, measures other than masking and screening testing remain in effect (see [CDC-recommended, effective measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19](#)).

I can understand how these changes may seem abrupt, so I want to assure you that our commitment to protecting the health and safety of our workforce has not wavered. As we work to implement these new policies and continue to increase our physical presence, I am very aware that everyone's comfort level with this new guidance will be different. As a community, it is critical that we understand and respect those differences as we move forward.

I want to emphasize that under the [new guidance](#), any employee is free to wear a mask if they choose, regardless of COVID-19 Community Level and consistent with agency protocols, and their choice should be respected by their EPA colleagues. We will review COVID-19 Community Levels in counties where EPA facilities are located on a weekly basis and will update building signage as necessary.

On Monday, we also welcomed our first group of employees — SES, SL, ST, Title 42 managers, and political appointees — back to the office as part of our phased transition. I was so excited to hear footsteps in the hall, to run into colleagues on my way across Pennsylvania Avenue, and to see so many offices using the technology we have around the agency to hold hybrid meetings with those of us who are continuing to work from home. It has also been helpful to walk around and see what things need to be tended to — for example, a lot of our clocks need new batteries! [Check out some pictures from this week.](#)

I've been encouraged by how smoothly this first week has gone, and I am looking forward to welcoming more of our workforce back to the office at the end of March, with the expanded flexibilities around increased telework and work schedules. We also continue to work with our union partners to identify return to work dates for our bargaining unit employees.

If you have questions in the coming weeks, you can speak with your supervisor or you can send an email to EPA_COVID-19_Coordination_Team@epa.gov.

Please keep an eye out for additional communications from me as we continue to work our way through the guidance and our phased transition back into our facilities.

Thank you for all your hard work and for everything that you do to protect public health and the environment. I am proud to work alongside of you every single day.

Janet McCabe

Deputy Administrator

Additional Information on the New Guidance

The guidance for federal agencies addresses mask-wearing and screening testing requirements based on the COVID-19 Community Level in the county in which a federal facility is located. We will review the COVID-19 Community Level for each county where EPA facilities are located on a weekly basis, to determine any changes that need to be made to agency COVID-19 workplace safety protocols for the upcoming week.

EPA Masking and Screening Testing Protocols based on COVID-19 Community Levels	
When the COVID-19 Community Level is LOW in the county where an EPA facility is located	<p>Mask-Wearing:</p> <p>Employees are not required to wear a mask in EPA facilities or EPA worksites, regardless of vaccination status.</p> <p>Screening Testing: EPA employees in the Screening Testing Program do not need to comply with EPA's Screening Testing Protocol requirements.</p>
When the COVID-19 Community Level is MEDIUM in the county where an EPA facility is located	<p>Mask-Wearing:</p> <p>Employees are not required to wear a mask in EPA facilities or EPA worksites, regardless of vaccination status.</p> <p>Screening Testing: EPA employees notified that they are a part of the Screening Testing Program must follow EPA's Screening Testing Protocol.</p>

<p>When the COVID-19 Community Level is HIGH in the county where an EPA facility is located</p>	<p>Mask-Wearing:</p> <p>Masks are required in EPA facilities, regardless of vaccination status and according to requirements outlined in the Workplace Safety Plan</p> <p>Screening Testing: EPA employees notified that they are a part of the Screening Testing Program must follow EPA's Screening Testing Protocol.</p>
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Additional Key Points

- Consistent with CDC recommendations and [Safer Federal Workforce Task Force guidance for quarantine and isolation](#), people with symptoms, a positive test, or exposure to someone with COVID-19 should wear a mask for the required period of time.
- Where a locality imposes more protective pandemic-related safety requirements, such as masking requirements, those requirements should be followed in federal facilities within that locality.
- Please remain mindful of all [CDC-recommended, effective measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19](#), including vaccination, frequent hand washing, and other measures.

Related Task Force Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) have also been updated on [SaferFederalWorkforce.gov](#).