

Supervisor and Manager FAQs

COVID-19

Q: Employees in my area are asking if they can work from home due to their underlying health conditions that may make them more susceptible to COVID-19. What should I do?

A: *We realize that individuals may be feeling worried about COVID-19. Employees who have underlying health conditions should contact the Disability and Leave Administration Unit (DLAU) at leaveunit@caltech.edu or 626-395-3092 and they can provide guidance and address questions.*

Q: Employees are healthy but nervous about working at their normal work location. Can I let them telecommute?

A: *Caltech has revised its telecommuting policy to help employees who may need to work from home. In situations where work can temporarily be performed from home or at an alternate location, we urge managers to work with employees to identify those instances and consider offering the option of telecommuting. A key consideration for managers is whether telecommuting is compatible with the employee's job responsibilities.*

If an employee is feeling stress or anxiety, please remind them of the resources they and their family can use (including counseling) through Staff and Faculty Consultation Center.

Q: What do we tell employees who simply prefer to work from home?

A: *Employees should work with their managers on the feasibility of temporarily telecommuting.*

Q: How do we respond to an employee who refuses to come to work due risk (actual or perceived)?

A: *We hope that the increased flexible work schedules will provide a solution for those employees who may be concerned about coming to work. However, employees cannot refuse to work but can explore options (work from home, social distancing while at work). They should talk with their managers or seek consultation from [Employee & Organizational Development](#). Additionally, the Staff and Faculty Consultation Center has resources to help employees who are feeling stress or anxiety about the uncertainty of the current world situation.*

Q: What about people who are unable to telecommute?

A: *Telecommuting is a great strategy to help create an environment with fewer people and greater social distancing, but we know at Caltech it is not always possible. For positions where telecommuting is not possible, we recommend following the [CDC guidelines for preventative hygiene](#), including washing your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, avoiding touching your face with unwashed hands, and cleaning and disinfecting surfaces.*

Q: Can meetings be conducted virtually?

A: One effective strategy for minimizing the spread of COVID-19 is greater social distancing. Social distancing can be accomplished by using technology (Zoom or teleconferencing) to reduce the number of meetings involving large numbers of people.

Q: How are you keeping employees who cannot telecommute safe?

A: Given the wide variety of services our staff provide to the Caltech community, we recognize many functions do not lend themselves to being performed from home. In those situations, we encourage employees to adhere to preventative hygiene measures. When these measures are practiced carefully and consistently, they are effective in reducing risk of the spread of the disease. In addition, employees should consult with their manager for specific protocols that may be in place for specific jobs.

Q: I am worried about exposure to COVID-19 at work. Will employees in my department be notified if a coworker is in self-isolation?

A: We take our employees' privacy seriously and will not share personal or medical information other than in a situation where it is believed other employees may also need to self-isolate. We are working closely with Pasadena Public Health on their established protocols for these situations.

Q: What resources are available to support larger numbers of temporary telecommuting employees?

A: Please see our [Guidelines for Temporary Telecommuting](#). IMSS can offer support on tools and technology related to telecommuting such as VPN.

Q: If my child's daycare or school is closed, may I work from home?

A: Yes, if your job responsibilities are compatible with working from home, the [Guidelines for Temporary Telecommuting](#) should be used. Managers must ensure that hourly (overtime-eligible) employees adhere to laws related to breaks, meal periods, and overtime.

However, if you are unable to effectively work while at home due to caregiving responsibilities, you may request vacation or other accrued leave. Please see our paid time off policies (PM 15-2 & PM 15-8) on the [HR website](#) for additional guidance.

Q: I do not have a work laptop issued to me. Can I use my personal computer in order to work from home?

A: Please refer to our [Guidelines for Temporary Telecommuting](#).

Q: I use public transportation to get to work, but with COVID-19 I don't feel comfortable. Can I work from home to avoid commuting on public transit?

A: *In situations where work can temporarily be performed from home or at an alternate location, we urge managers to work with employees to identify those instances and consider telecommuting. A key consideration for managers is whether telecommuting is compatible with the employee's job responsibilities. Managers can contact [Employee and Organizational Development](#) for guidance.*

Q: If Caltech or a healthcare provider requires an employee to self-isolate and their work cannot be done from home, what options do they have (leave, sick time, etc.)? What if they do not have any paid time left?

A: *Employees must use all available accrued sick leave under these circumstances. If an employee does not have accrued sick leave, employees should reach out to the Disability and Leave Unit at leaveunit@caltech.edu for direction on leave usage.*

Q: What if an employee gets stuck in a remote location away from their residence and is unable to work (no laptop or internet for example)? Should they charge their absence to PTO and vacation?

A: *Yes, the employee should be in contact with their manager to request to use vacation and/or PTO.*

Q: If our family lives with someone who recently traveled to an affected area, what should we do?

A: *You should self-isolate if you (or anyone in your home) have returned from travel to one of the [high risk countries](#) in the last 14 days. This includes all individuals, including children, with or without symptoms.*

A: How can we encourage relatively new employees with limited sick time on the books to stay home if feeling they have ill?

Q: *We realize that a new employee may not want to miss work in their first days at Caltech. However, it is important that they take care of themselves and not expose others in the office to their illness if they are not feeling well. We will require those who are sick or self-quarantining to use available sick time accruals. Once those are exhausted, managers should call DLAU for guidance.*