



Return to the Office Manual

H-GAC COVID-19 Guidance

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Revision 1 - May 19, 2020

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1. Read This First

This *Return to the Office Manual* is designed to be our guide for a safe return to the office at 3555 Timmons Lane and is required reading for all Houston-Galveston Area Council team members. We will start small, return in phases, and place safety as our highest priority. This manual you are reading is important. It contains protocols, instructions, roles and responsibilities, and other critical information. Sometimes the language sounds a bit commanding. It needs to be. Safety is serious stuff.

The senior management team has been working to ensure that when we begin our return, we do so in a manner that is considerate of and safe for our team members. Any first step into new territory is likely to encounter something unexpected. We will likely refine this guidance as we work through the first phase of our return.

This guidance is a continuation of our transparent process for adapting our work to the COVID-19 pandemic and includes consideration of staff comments shared at the May 4 staff meeting. We'll update you as more developments occur. You are welcome to provide suggestions, ask questions, and share your thoughts.

It is critical that all team members adhere to the guidance contained within this document while working at the office. This guidance is mandatory and is not optional. Together we can ensure a safe and orderly return.

2. Background

The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) implemented a remote work program in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on March 16, 2020. The phased approach to our remote program prioritized team members who found themselves unable to secure dependent care as schools shutdown, at a higher-risk due to underlying health conditions (as identified by the Centers for Disease Control), or had other special considerations. The Executive Director accelerated the shift to remote work as guidance from federal, state, and local officials rapidly developed and stay at home orders began to take effect. We completed our transition to remote work for all team members on March 20.

As we enter our third month of remote work, several team members have reached out to their Managers and Directors and expressed a need to return to the office, to be in a workplace that meets their daily needs and helps ensure they can be effective. As stay-at-home orders expire and the State of Texas and our region re-open, we have an opportunity to begin a phased approach to return to our office at 3555 Timmons Lane in Houston. This manual provides policies and protocols that will guide our return.

3. Effective Date and Duration

This *Return to the Office Manual*, which contains specific details on returning to our worksite at 3555 Timmons Lane, will be issued on Monday May 11 and will be effective on May 18, 2020. It is subject to revision at any time and will remain in effect until further notice.

Revisions – The first revision to this manual includes incorporating a section on our procedures for responding to the scenarios of illness and COVID-19 at the office (Section 9), adding a revision summary to Section 3, and associated corrections to the cover and table of contents.

4. Using a Phased Approach for Our Return

We will use a phased approach to our return that will essentially be in reverse order of our earlier departure. Phase III of our Remote Work Program began March 18, includes all team members, and is effective through May 15. We will transition from Phase III to Phase IV beginning May 18, 2020.

Phase IV – Limited Return - Launches May 18

The majority of H-GAC team members will continue to work from home during Phase IV. Several of our team members have expressed a desire to return to the office to ensure they remain productive and focused. We will begin the first step in returning to the office on Monday, May 18. This initial stage of our return will be voluntary and small, limited to between 20 to 40 team members, and will not exceed 10 people assigned to each floor on any given day. Phase IV will include a mix of office time and remote work.

Phase V – Expanded Return - Commences June 1

Phase V will include an expanded return to the office and include team members who are not directly impacted by a lack of dependent care, and/or are at a high-risk of serious illness of COVID-19 or live with family members who are in the high-risk category. Team members in the above-referenced situations may continue to work remotely during Phase V. We anticipate starting Phase V around June 1. Phase V will include a mix of office time, remote work, and staggered work schedules to maintain appropriate social distancing.

We are in the early stages of planning beyond Phase V. The future of work at our agency will include a variety of in-person meetings, field work, office time, and working remote. We will be looking long-term and developing criteria for equipment, technology, and productivity tools.

5. Preparing the Office for Our Return

Coordinating with Building Management

Building management will purge water lines, change air filters, and run the ventilation system for 48-hours prior to May 18 to ensure a fresh work environment.

The parking garage will be available for returning team members. Tapping your badge at the gates may be necessary to gain access. Security guards will be on duty. The building will remain accessible by badge for H-GAC and other tenants. Building management has professionally cleaned the carpet in anticipation of our return.

We are coordinating with building management to ensure an appropriate cleaning frequency for our common areas, restrooms and other public areas of the building. Specific areas and frequencies are outlined below in section 8 of this manual.

Limiting Access to Our Office

Access to our building and work floors will remain restricted until further notice. Badges have been deactivated. If you participate in Phase IV and/or Phase V, we will reactivate your badge according to your preapproved schedule. If you need one-time or occasional access to the building, please contact your Manager or Director to seek approval from the Executive Director. Directors have received approval for a small number of employees to have access. This is for limited, occasional access to the office for critical functions that can only take place at the building.

We will limit access to gathering areas by restricting access to meeting rooms and conference rooms and temporarily closing the breakroom and coffee bars until further notice. These spaces will be locked and posted with reminders. Sinks at coffee bars will be accessible for handwashing. Bottled drinking water will be provided during the day.

Purchasing and Deploying Equipment and Supplies

We have purchased the following equipment and supplies in anticipation of our return to the office – fabric face coverings, headphones, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, disposable gloves, cleaning and disinfectant supplies, signage, and workstation shields for specific locations. The cleaning and disinfectant supplies are EPA and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) listed and approved against COVID-19. The lobby receptionist and administrative assistants with transaction counters will have protective shields installed at their workstations due to high foot traffic and extensive collaboration work.

Installing Signage

We will post wall signs and floor decals to remind us how we can all work together to practice personal hygiene, maintain a clean work environment, and observe social distancing.

Carpet Cleaning

We've cleaned the carpet on all floors and will continue to sanitize the carpet on a monthly basis until further notice.

6. Preparing the Team for Our Return

Once we have the office ready, we will need to make sure our team is prepared and understands the new expectations we have in place for returning to the office.

Identifying Team Members for Office Work

Phase IV will be voluntary and limited to no more than 40 team members. If you are interested in returning the office as part of Phase IV, please contact your Manager or Director. The senior management team will plan for appropriate workstation spacings and schedules prior to the start of each work week, so you may volunteer to return starting May 18 or May 25.

We anticipate issuing guidance on identifying eligible team members for Phase V on or around May 25.

Core Hours for Office Work

To ensure a manageable return while limiting access to the office, we will implement core office hours of 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. during Phase IV. We will maintain our policy of a one-hour lunch break. The stated core hours translate into an earliest arrival time of 7:00 a.m. and a latest departure time of 6:00 p.m.

Establishing Office Work Schedules

Team members may use a combination of office and remote work for Phase IV and Phase V. The number of office days per week shall be no less than 2 and no more than 4; and the selected days of the week shall be full days and consistent from week to week (i.e., in the office Monday-Wednesday, remote work on Thursday).

Adhering to a consistent schedule will be important to ensure proper planning for workstation planning and social distancing. The duration of a team member’s daily work shift will correspond to their existing schedule and include 8 or 9 work hours and a one-hour lunch. The proposed work shift and schedule is subject to approval by your manager and subject to modification by the senior management team to meet our onsite workstation spacing protocols.

The senior management team will review proposed schedules and workstation locations prior to the beginning of each work week to ensure we maintain our social distancing protocols and floor capacity limits.

Training and Orientation

We will provide training of the online wellness screening and work shift designation tool prior to team members arriving at the office to start Phase IV. We will also provide onsite orientation when you begin your return to the office so you can be aware of signage, location of supplies, and other protocols.

7. Day to Day Precautions – Before Traveling to the Office Each Day

Our precautions for Phase IV and Phase V include activities to be completed each day before traveling to the office. We will implement daily wellness screening and a work shift start and stop time process for team members intending to access the office beginning Monday, May 18. This will apply to onsite participants of Phase IV and Phase V, and team members requiring occasional access to the office. Both protocols will be part of an online process to be completed from home each morning.

Conduct a Daily Wellness Screening

The wellness screening will be self-administered, confidential, available via our intranet, and includes criteria that align with the Governor’s guidance on opening Texas. Team members will access the self-screening checklist from home each day prior to arriving at the office. We are also recommending that team members take their temperature as part of the daily wellness screening.

The symptoms checklist will include: cough; shortness of breath or difficulty breathing; chills; repeated shaking with chills; muscle pain; headache; sore throat; loss of taste or smell; diarrhea; and, feeling feverish or a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit. The screening will also inquire if you have had known close contact with a person who is lab confirmed to have COVID-19.

If an individual indicates they have certain symptoms, contact, and/or a temperature above 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, the online system will indicate that they will not be able to access the office, to remain at home and follow-up with your health care provider as appropriate. Information regarding your wellness screen response will not be retained and only used to produce one of two summary statements; “Cleared to Work at the Office” or “Remain at Home, Do Not Travel to the Office.” The daily wellness screening tool will be available via our intranet.

Stay Home if You are Sick

Stay Home if You are Sick – if you are displaying symptoms of COVID-19 disease, or just don’t feel well in general, please do not report to the office. Be accountable to yourself and to your coworkers and help maintain a safe office work environment. If you are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 disease contact your health care provider.

Specify Your Work Shift

We will use a simple work shift tracking tool to ensure we can account for team members working at the office during Phase IV and Phase V. Each team member intending to access the office will also be required to use our online start time and stop time system. This process will be part of the daily screening tool and will include fields for anticipated arrival and departure times and floor designation. In the event the selected floor is at capacity, the team member will receive a notice the floor is full. If this occurs, the employee is expected to work from home.

8. Day to Day Precautions - While Working at the Office

Our day to day precautions while working at the office during Phase IV and Phase V will focus on personal hygiene, maintaining a clean work environment, and social distancing.

Management Available Onsite – Director of the Day

We will maintain a Management presence onsite each day. A designated Director of the Day will be available to address issues and concerns that may arise onsite and ensure an added safety measure during our return. Team members will still report to their supervisor for work duties and assignments. The Director of the Day (and their contact information) will be identified on the intranet and hallway monitors.

Personal Hygiene

Personal hygiene is essential for a successful and safe return to the office. The following are minimum expectations for each team member accessing the office as part of Phase IV and Phase V and occasional office visits.

Wash Hands – We will be following the CDC recommendation to wash our hands with soap and water frequently to prevent spreading germs. You are expected to wash your hands upon arrival to your work floor. We will deploy hand soap and disposable toweling at the restroom and common areas sinks. In the event soap and water are not available, hand sanitizer will be available.

Use Hand Sanitizer – We expect team members at the office to use hand sanitizer when accessing common areas such as printers and copiers, doors, and other shared items and fixtures. We will station alcohol-based hand sanitizer in common areas and provide a personal-size bottle of hand sanitizer at each workstation when team members return to the office. In addition to issuing personal-size bottles of hand sanitizer to team members, we will place larger bottles in common areas.

Wear Face Coverings in Common Areas – We will provide each employee with a reusable fabric-face covering to use when entering/exiting building and when going into any of the common areas, such as copiers, printers, elevators, lobby, stairwells, other workstations, and print shop. Each team member may also choose to provide their own appropriate face covering. Face coverings are not required while at your workstation; but wear your face covering when you leave your workstation.

Observe Signage – We will post signs and instructions on how we can all work together to maintain an appropriate level of personal hygiene.

Maintaining a Clean Work Environment

Building janitorial staff will continue to maintain cleanliness in our restrooms, common areas, stairwells, and other public areas of the building. We have worked with building management to ensure that building sanitation measures meet the protocols of the CDC. As such, all cleaning chemicals are on the approved list provided by the Environmental Protection Agency and CDC to be effective in sanitizing against the COVID-19 viral transmission. Specific frequencies and measures are included below.

Janitorial Crew - All janitorial workers will wear masks and gloves while working in tenant space. All janitorial personnel have received additional sanitation training to reinforce cleaning standards.

Carpets - All carpets, including within each cubicle space, have been cleaned by professional carpet care experts to provide sanitary workspace. Carpets will be re-cleaned monthly for every floor.

Floors - All hard-surface flooring will be cleaned daily. Floors in common areas will be cleaned twice a day, at a minimum.

Restrooms - Restrooms will be sanitized 2-3 times daily. Hand soap, hand sanitizer, and disposable towels will be available. All trash in bathrooms will be removed at least twice daily.

Common Areas, Elevators, Doors and Handles - All common areas, elevator buttons, door handles, and doors will be sanitized every two hours.

Fire Stairwells - Handrails in the fire stairwells will be cleaned 3-4 times daily. Employees are encouraged to sanitize their hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer when entering the office space. Hand soap will be available at the sink on each floor and disposable towels will be available.

The H-GAC team will work together to maintain areas of the office that are our responsibility. These areas include our workstations and printer/copier areas.

Cleaning Office Workstations – Recognizing the diversity of opinions on sanitation requirements, we will supply each team member a workstation clean-up kit upon return to the office. The kit will include a fabric face covering, alcohol sanitizer wipes, and a personal-sized container of hand sanitizer. These kits will provide employees an opportunity to sanitize their work area to the degree and frequency needed for their comfort. Disinfectant and disposable toweling will also be available. This is a requirement to clean your workstation each day upon arrival and departure.

Cleaning Printer and Copier Areas - We will provide disinfectant spray, cleaning wipes, and disposable toweling for use at printer and copier areas. Avoid spraying disinfectant directly on the printers and copiers to avoid damaging the equipment. Cleaning instructions will be posted at each location. We will also deploy these supplies in common areas in case you see an area that needs attention between housekeeping cycles.

We will post signs and instructions on how we can all work together to maintain a clean work environment.

Social Distancing

Social distancing, or more appropriately physical distancing, will be necessary to ensure a successful and safe return to the office. This precaution can require a certain amount of patience with ourselves and each other as we work through being apart while being together in the office. Be mindful of others and respect the social distancing recommendation of 6 feet between you and your co-workers.

Observe Floor Occupancy Limits – No more than 10 team members will be stationed on each floor during Phase IV. Team members shall remain on their assigned floors during their work shift at the office and not migrate across work floors, unless their job duties require. If a staff member is on a floor that was not scheduled to be there that day, they will be asked to return home to telework. Do not casually visit other floors. Floor limits for Phase V are currently under consideration and will be detailed in future guidance.

Limit Gatherings – We will naturally want to visit with our coworkers when returning to the office. Please exercise caution and practice social distancing. Do not linger at the printer, copier, sink, restroom, hallways, coworkers' cubicles, and other common areas.

As stated earlier, we will limit access to gathering areas by restricting access to meeting rooms and conference rooms and temporarily closing the breakroom and coffee bars until further notice. These spaces will be locked and posted with reminders. Sinks at coffee bars will be accessible for handwashing. Bottled drinking water will be provided during the day.

Team members may request access to file rooms and storage areas by contacting the Director of the Day. The Director of the Day will coordinate access with the facilities staff.

Use One-way Foot Traffic – We will implement one-way foot traffic on our floors to minimize close-range interactions. We will use wall signs to help remind us of proper navigation.

Respect Elevator Limits – We will need to comply with Building Management's policy regarding elevator limits. Limit elevator passengers to two people per elevator; if you arrive at the elevator and there are already two people there, please wait for the next elevator. Queueing for elevators will require persons to wear face masks and practice social distancing at least six feet apart. This process will be re-evaluated as the building occupancy increases.

Be Mindful of Restroom Protocols - Restrooms will have controlled access, with occupied/vacant signs to allow only one person in the bathroom at a time. Queueing for bathroom facilities will require persons to wear masks and social distance at least six feet apart.

Observe Signage – We will post floor decals and wall posters as friendly reminders to practice social distancing and remain vigilant.

Conduct Meetings Remotely – We will continue to employ Microsoft Teams, GoToWebinar, or phone calls to convene meetings and collaborate with colleagues, committees, and agency partners while at the office. We will also limit access to our workspaces and not permit stakeholder, contractor, or other external visitors to our workspace until further notice.

9. Responding to Illness and COVID-19 at the Office

This part of the manual can be a bit unsettling because it considers a worst-case scenario. Part of preparing a safe workplace for our team is to have procedures in place in case a team member becomes ill at the office or we are notified of a documented case of COVID-19 on one of our work floors. These procedures are based on CDC guidance and subject to change.

If a Team Member Becomes Ill While at the Office

We will count on you to let us know if you become ill at the office. If you feel ill, we will help you keep distance from co-workers, figure out how to help you get home or to a health care provider, and work with

you to determine when you can return to the office after you have recovered. Here are some specific procedures to help keep ill team members and their co-workers safe.

Let Us Know - Team members who become ill and experience COVID-19 symptoms at the office should notify their supervisor and contact the Director of the Day so we can help the team member return home or travel to a health care provider.

We'll Need to Separate You from Co-Workers - The Director of the Day will discretely relocate an ill team member to a designated conference room to help safely separate them from other team members. The conference room will be on the same floor as the team member is stationed.

We'll Help You Get Home or to a Healthcare Provider - The Director of the Day and ill team member will discuss options for leaving the office and travelling home or to a health care provider. Options for the team member include driving themselves (if symptoms are minor), contacting a friend or family member for a ride, and third-party driver (i.e., taxicab). H-GAC will provide a ride home or to a health care provider via taxicab if team members are unable or unwilling to drive themselves or arrange for a ride. The Director of the Day will call 911 if immediate medical attention is required.

It May Be Awhile Before Returning to the Office - Team members exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms should follow [CDC-recommended steps](#) to prevent the spread of the virus. This includes not returning to the office until they are fever free, other symptoms have improved, and at least 10 days have passed since the onset of symptoms. If a team member is confirmed to have COVID-19 they will not be allowed to return to the office until the criteria to [discontinue home isolation](#) are met, in consultation with healthcare providers.

In the Event of a Documented Occurrence of COVID-19 at the Office

We are committed to respond quickly in the event of a documented case of COVID-19 at the office. Our approach will include contacting local health officials, sending all team members at the office home, notifying the H-GAC team, coordinating with building management, and restricting access to certain areas or the entire office as appropriate. We will also [follow CDC guidance for cleaning and disinfecting the workplace](#).

A closing word on privacy. We are aware of privacy concerns associated with notifying co-workers about documented cases of COVID-19 and we commit to balancing privacy with protecting the safety and welfare of fellow team members.

As always, you are welcome to provide suggestions, ask questions, and share your thoughts. Together we can implement a safe return to our office, protect one another, and continue our excellent service to our region.