

Temporary workplace changes to promote social distancing

NALC and the Postal Service agreed to implement temporary workplace changes to promote social distancing among city letter carriers (M-01915). The agreement commits the parties to limiting individuals to working only in their employing facilities to the extent possible. The MOU also directs the local parties to immediately discuss potential scheduling and office setup changes such as staggered start times; scheduling letter carriers to begin tours in groups of 10 or less; the manner in which stand-up talks are given, as well as break locations and times; and other initiatives to maximize social distancing.

“Things that we took for granted in the past suddenly require adaptation,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said in a statement.

The agreement expires on May 27, 2020; however, the parties will revisit this issue immediately prior to that date to determine if an extension is appropriate.

Two new types of leave and two new MOUs to help with COVID-19 related absences

Effective April 1, 2020, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) provides employees with two additional types of leave. First, employees with a qualifying circumstance as defined by the act will be eligible for up to 80 hours of paid emergency sick leave, in addition to their sick leave balances. Second, employees who have a minor child whose school or place of care is closed will be eligible for leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), the majority of which is additional paid leave. These provisions will apply from April 1 through Dec. 31, and are in addition to any personal annual and/or sick leave balances that you have.

An employee is entitled to use the additional 80 hours of paid emergency sick leave for absences related to COVID-19 if the employee is unable to work, including unable to telework, because the employee:

1. Is subject to a federal, state or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19
2. Has been advised to self-quarantine by a health care provider
3. Is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and is seeking a medical diagnosis
4. Is caring for an individual subject to a federal, state or local quarantine or self-quarantine
5. Is caring for his or her child whose school or place of care is closed, or the childcare provider is unavailable due to COVID-19 related reasons

6. Is experiencing any other substantially similar conditions specified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

With regard to qualifying reason 1, in many cities and states, government authorities have issued a quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19. Some local and state governments have also identified groups of people that should self-quarantine, such as individuals over a certain age. While the Postal Service is considered mission critical and not subject to state and local directives, employees that choose to self-quarantine in these circumstances may be eligible to use up to 80 hours of emergency sick leave to cover their absence.

All career and non-career employees, regardless of tenure, are immediately eligible for up to two weeks of fully or partially paid emergency sick leave. Full-time career employees can receive up to 80 hours of paid emergency sick leave. Part-time career employees can receive emergency sick leave up to the number of hours equal to their average work hours during a two-week period or the hours they would have worked. Non-career employees can receive emergency sick leave for up to 80 hours based on their average work hours during a two-week period or the hours they would have worked.

For qualifying reasons 1, 2 and 3, the emergency sick leave is 100 percent of the letter carrier’s pay, but capped at \$511 per day and \$5,110 total. For qualifying reasons 4, 5 and 6, the emergency sick leave will be no less than two-thirds of the letter carrier’s pay, but capped at \$200 per day and \$2,000 total.

With regard to the other type of additional leave, the Emergency Family and Medical Leave Expansion, an employee is entitled to take leave related to COVID-19 if the employee is unable to work, including telework, because the employee is caring for his or her child whose school or place of care is closed or the childcare provider is unavailable due to COVID-19 related reasons. This qualifying reason is the same as qualifying reason number 5 for emergency sick leave.

All employees who have been employed for 30 days or longer are eligible for this benefit if they meet the qualifying reason. This new qualifying reason does not add to the 12 weeks of FMLA already provided for in the law. When using this new qualifying reason, the first 10 days of the 12-week FMLA coverage will be unpaid. To receive pay for the first 10 days, an employee can choose to use their own earned leave or may use the 80 hours emergency sick leave explained above. The remaining 10 weeks of FMLA leave for this qualifying reason will be paid leave. This leave is required to be paid out at no less than two-thirds of the letter carriers’ pay, but capped at \$200 per day and \$10,000 total.

Again, the two new types of leave identified above are in addition to the contractual benefits to which USPS employees are otherwise entitled, such as their normal earned leave or temporary benefits recently agreed upon in two memorandums of understanding (MOUs). In those MOUs, NALC and the Postal Service agreed to address obvious concerns such as childcare needs caused by the large number of schools and daycares that have closed, and the need for city carrier assistants to have additional paid leave to use during this unprecedented crisis. M-01910 allows career letter carriers to use sick leave for dependent care to care for a child as the result of a closed daycare, school or the unavailability of the child’s primary caregiver. M-01911 gives city carrier assistants an additional 80 hours of paid leave to use for specific reasons in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, since CCAs do not earn sick leave. Both of these MOUs expire on May 27, 2020, however, the national parties will revisit these issues immediately prior to that date to determine if an extension is appropriate.

Make sure you have the safety supplies you need

NALC asks that letter carriers communicate with their NALC branch officers or national business agent if they see problems in their office with lack of cleaning, shortage of sanitizing supplies, standup talks not being conducted, social distancing not being practiced, quarantine protocols not being followed or any instruction that conflicts with the guidance being provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The union has been successful getting many of these issues resolved, but needs to know where the problems are so it can get them fixed.

“We communicate daily with USPS officials regarding these issues,” President Fredric Rolando said, “and we are committed to doing our part to correct each issue as it arises.”

USPS has committed to provide daily supplies necessary for postal employees to clean frequently-touched items in the office, as well as provide necessary supplies for letter carriers to use to clean steering wheels and other frequently-touched surfaces in postal vehicles. They have also committed to provide supplies for use while on the street, such as hand sanitizer, as well as cleaning supplies to maintain cleanliness on surfaces in the vehicle and on other surfaces we encounter on the street. Letter carriers should have sufficient hand sanitizer to keep your hands clean all day as you touch the many surfaces on your route. They have also committed to provide masks and nitrile gloves for any employee that requests them.

“It is my understanding that the USPS has received a large shipment of supplies at its central distribution warehouse in Topeka, KS, that are now being received in delivery units throughout the country,” Rolando said. “If your manager or supervisor tells you that supplies are backordered, please ask them if they ordered directly from the USPS facility in Topeka. USPS has informed us that they now have a significant amount of supplies on hand at this facility and are distributing them. If orders are placed through vendors rather than directly from Topeka, they will likely be backordered.”

In a March 25 statement found on the COVID-19 page on the NALC website, Rolando discussed what letter carriers should do locally regarding such unsafe conditions. Please refer to that statement for an in-depth explanation of how to report such conditions, as well as management’s responsibility to correct them. If you are told by your supervisor to work in an unsafe environment, either in the office, in the vehicle or on the street, please inform your local union representative, branch president or NBA immediately.

Get the answers to USPS-related COVID-19 questions

In addition to contacting your shop steward, branch officer or national business agent (NBA), NALC has a new resource for members to ask any questions about the COVID-19 pandemic: COVID19@nalc.org. Many NALC members have already used this new resource.

If you do not have the supplies you need to keep yourself safe, please contact a branch officer or your NBA to let them know, but you can also use this new email address to voice your concerns. In addition to using this new resource to ask questions, please use it to report COVID-19 related issues in your facility when you do not have immediate access to a steward or branch officer and you are unable to contact your NBA office. Please be sure to include your name and NALC branch number in your email. Having this information upfront allows NALC headquarters to quickly connect members with the information they need.

What happens if you may have been exposed to COVID-19?

Recently, the Postal Service released a document directing its supervisors and managers how to make decisions regarding steps to take and what type of leave should be afforded to employees who have had certain forms of exposure (or potential exposure) to COVID-19 or who have travelled to certain countries or by way of a cruise ship. The guidance is offered for employees who fall into one of the following six categories:

1. An employee who tests positive for COVID-19
2. An employee who develops a fever and symptoms such as a cough or difficulty breathing
3. An employee who has visited certain countries or traveled on a cruise ship in the past 14 days
4. An employee who shares a household with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19
5. An employee who has been exposed, outside of work, to an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19
6. An employee who has been exposed to an individual who was exposed to an individual who tested positive for COVID-19

When an employee tests positive for COVID-19, they should be placed on the emergency sick leave provided by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA). This leave is above and beyond the leave letter carriers normally earn, and it is afforded to all employees, whether career or non-career, and without regard to length of employment. When an employee develops a fever and symptoms such as a cough or difficulty breathing, they should also be sent home and placed on the emergency sick leave provided by the FFCRA. After an employee returns from travel on a cruise ship or from certain high-risk countries, they should stay home for 14 days and be also paid emergency sick leave as provided by the Act. If that employee later shows symptoms of COVID-19, and has exhausted the emergency sick leave, they must remain at home on normal sick leave or annual leave until they are cleared to return to work.

If an employee shares a household with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19, they should stay home and be afforded emergency sick leave as provided by the Act. Employees in this situation should stay at home until the household member has had no fever for at least 72 hours (at least three full days of no fever without the use of any fever-reducing medications) and other symptoms have improved (for example, when cough or shortness of breath has improved) and at least seven days have passed since COVID-19 symptoms first appeared.

If an employee has been exposed, outside of work, to an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19, then the District or Area Occupational Health Nurse Administrator (OHNA) should contact the local Health Department for advice. If the local Health Department reviews the circumstances and orders the employee to quarantine, then he or she should be afforded up to 80 hours of emergency sick leave in accordance with the Act. If the local Health Department reviews the circumstances and does not order the employee to quarantine, then he or she can return to work. If the local Health Department does not perform the review as requested, then the OHNA will make the determination whether to quarantine the employee or not.

If an employee has been exposed to an individual who was exposed to an individual who tested positive for COVID-19, then he or she will be cleared to work. USPS states that according to CDC guidelines, people in this situation are not considered exposed.

The guidelines issued by the Postal Service have been given to supervisors and managers, so they know what to do in those certain situations. If you believe you may have been exposed to COVID-19, and such exposure does not necessarily “fit” into one of the above categories to be quarantined, you may self-quarantine. Or if you are concerned that you may be exposed to someone at work who you think should be quarantined, you may self-quarantine. If you call and share your concerns with your doctor, and your doctor advises you to self-quarantine, you can use the 80 hours of emergency sick leave provided by the Act. Or, if there is a state or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19 in effect where you live, you may also be eligible to use the 80 hours of emergency sick leave to self-quarantine. And in any case, you can always use your own leave to self-quarantine. In the event you are contacted by a local public health official and identified as someone who may have had contact with an individual who has tested positive for coronavirus, please immediately inform your supervisor and local NALC branch officer as a means to protect your coworkers and community.

The NALC Health Benefit Plan extends coverage to support members during pandemic

As a result of the rapidly evolving COVID-19 pandemic, the NALC Health Benefit Plan has made it a priority to help members get the care they need by removing any barriers that would prevent our members from getting necessary testing.

Diagnostic testing for COVID-19

We will now cover physician ordered diagnostic testing at 100 percent for patients that meet the CDC guidelines for COVID-19. We will also cover the associated office visit at 100 percent.

Office visits for COVID-19

High Option members: If you use a PPO provider, your office visit copayment will be waived. If you use a non-PPO provider, we will pay 100 percent of the Plan’s allowance for the office visit.

CDHP/VO members: If you use a PPO provider, your office visit coinsurance of 20 percent will be waived. If you use a non-PPO provider, we will pay 100 percent of the Plan’s allowance for the office visit.

Telehealth Programs

In addition to the virtual doctor visits available through NALCHBP Telehealth Programs (provided by American Well when enrolled in the High Option Plan or MDLive when enrolled in the CDHP or Value Option Program), the Plan will now cover medically necessary online telehealth office visits with other providers. This will be effective March 1 until further notice.

Benefits	High Option	CDHP/Value Option
Virtual office visit with provider of choice	PPO: \$20 copayment Non-PPO: 30% coinsurance*	PPO: 20% coinsurance** Non-PPO: 50%**
Plan’s current telehealth programs	\$10 copayment when visit is through American Well www.nalchbptelehealth.org 888-541-7706	10% coinsurance** when visit is through MDLive www.MDLiveforCigna.com
*Deductible applies **You must exhaust your PCA and satisfy your deductible		

Prescription Benefits

CVS Pharmacy is now offering the option of home delivery, where available, of all prescription medications at no charge. We are also waiving early refill limits on 30-day prescriptions for maintenance medication prescriptions ahead of their normal fill schedule. Please take advantage of our 90-day prescription benefit for maintenance medications and be sure to refill any eligible 90-day maintenance medications so that you stay adherent during this pandemic.

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