

JOHNSON COUNTY GOVERNMENT COVID-19 MITIGATION PLAN FOR STAFF

August 11, 2021

A. What is a Mitigation Plan?

This is a multifaceted approach to combat the spread of COVID-19 among the Johnson County workforce created in an effort to ensure, to the best of our ability, that the county has available a sufficient number of healthy and non-quarantined staff, both overall and in individual departments, to provide, without interruption, the services upon which the public relies.¹ Further, as stewards of the community's resources with a self-insured health plan, it is the County's responsibility to help manage healthcare costs by maintaining a healthy workplace. According to Johnson County Health Department officials, unvaccinated individuals have a greater risk of becoming seriously ill and requiring hospitalization, which, in turn, increases healthcare expenses. Additionally, this plan will help prevent infection of the public by Johnson County staff.

B. Business Need for a Plan

COVID-19 remains a serious health risk for Johnson County residents and staff and a serious threat to the county's ability to provide necessary and uninterrupted service. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the county has been required to implement furloughs, close public-facing offices and services from time to time to avoid or respond to outbreaks, and find ways to serve the public remotely, which is not possible or optimal for all services. The hope was that with the availability of a vaccine, the threats from the virus would be substantially diminished and the county would be able to operate with confidence that it would not suffer the consequences of a major outbreak. Unfortunately, only 57% of Johnson County residents and 46% of Johnson County regular employees have reported being fully vaccinated.² Vaccination rates in the surrounding areas, where many county employees reside, shop, and attend entertainment events, are even lower. Many county employees deal directly with the public. While the contacts vary in duration and proximity to members of the public (from over the counter transactions to hands-on assistance), all of these transactions present an increased risk of infection to staff, particularly when the public is not wearing masks. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as little as 15 minutes of cumulative exposure during a 24-hour period, whether to one infected individual or several individuals, increases the risk of infection.

National, local, and internal statistics reveal that over the last several weeks, there has been a rapid increase in COVID-19 cases in the metropolitan area, including Johnson County, as well as among Johnson County staff. While the current spike is related primarily to the delta variant of the virus, until more people are vaccinated, our health department officials tell us that we can expect new variants

¹ "Department" is used generically throughout this document to refer to Johnson County departments, agencies, and offices other than the Sheriff's Office and the Johnson County Park and Recreation District.

² Employee data is based on voluntary reporting.

(that may be even more transmissible, more virulent and/or better able to avoid the immune protection from currently available vaccines), a rise in cases during the winter months, and continued spread of COVID-19. An outbreak among staff creates a high potential for staff shortages, disruption of services and/or increased labor costs to avoid disruption. To avert or at least mitigate the effects of an outbreak among staff, the County needs to implement a plan utilizing those tools already in place along with new tools as described below.

C. Components of the Plan

For the plan to have the greatest impact, each of the components must be employed simultaneously. A staged approach, moving from one component to the next over time, is unlikely to be as effective.

1. **Employee Masks** – On July 27, 2021, the CDC announced additional safety guidance in response to the rapid increase of delta variant COVID-19 cases throughout the country. This guidance recommended mask use by both vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals in indoor settings in areas of high transmission, which includes Johnson County. As we have done throughout the pandemic, Johnson County Government took action that aligned with the CDC guidance, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and the Johnson County Department of Health and Environment (DHE) by re-implementing its employee mask mandate. On July 29, the County Manager announced that all employees, independent contractors, and volunteers, regardless of vaccination status, are required to wear masks while indoors except when they are alone in their office or workstation or when they are on a meal break and actually eating. All employees who must ride together in a vehicle must wear a mask. Because the virus does not easily spread in outdoor environments, except in large crowds, employees may, but are not required to, wear masks while working outside.
2. **COVID-19 Testing** – Early detection of infected employees is critical to preventing widespread infection. Until a sufficient number of employees are vaccinated, or the threat of an outbreak is otherwise mitigated, employees who are not fully vaccinated and employees who are fully vaccinated but have an approved accommodation exempting them from the mask mandate are required to submit to regular COVID-19 testing.
 - a. **Testing Intervals** – Because they provide services requiring close interaction with clients, and because of interaction between staff who provide such services and those who do not, all employees in the following departments who are not fully vaccinated, or are fully vaccinated but have an approved accommodation exempting them from the mask mandate, are subject to tests up to twice weekly: Aging and Human Services, Corrections, Emergency Services, Health and Environment, Mental Health, and Developmental Supports. Employees of all other departments are subject to weekly testing. Testing frequency will be determined by and may be modified by the department director in consultation with the Director of DHE.
 - b. **Testing Schedules and Protocol** – Testing will begin on August 23, 2021 and will be conducted pursuant to schedules and a protocol established by the Department of Human Resources

(HRD) in conjunction with DHE and the various county departments. HRD will have primary responsibility for the testing program.

- c. Type of Test – The tests kits are provided by Clinical Reference Laboratory (CRL) in Lenexa and will be distributed to departments by HRD. The test does not typically involve a nasal swab. Instead, the employee’s saliva will be collected and tested. Employees will self-administer the test, which involves collecting their own saliva into a test tube. They will return the test kit to a designated location to be delivered back to CRL, which will conduct the tests. Distribution and collection of test kits will be in accordance with the COVID-19 Testing Protocol. Nasal swab tests will be required for individuals for whom a saliva test is ineffective.
 - d. Costs – All CRL test kits will be provided free of charge to employees, and the testing will be free of charge as well.
 - e. Reporting Test Results – CRL will report results to the employee through a portal, to HRD, and to DHE. CRL will not report results to the employee’s department. Employees who test positive will be required to isolate. HRD staff will contact those with a positive result to confirm that they are not in the workplace and to investigate potential exposure of co-workers and others. HRD staff will notify those who been exposed to an employee who has tested positive but will not identify that employee by name. Those exposed will be required to quarantine according to CDC guidance.
 - f. Voluntary Tests – Those employees who are not required to test may do so voluntarily on the scheduled days for their department.
 - g. Maintenance of Test Results – Test results will be maintained in HRD as confidential medical records.
 - h. In addition to the regular testing schedule, the county may require COVID-19 tests for employees who have been exposed to the virus or who are symptomatic.
3. Vaccinations – According to the CDC and DHE, vaccination is the best weapon against this virus. More than 50% of Johnson County staff are not yet vaccinated. Unvaccinated individuals are most likely to contract the virus and to have more serious illness. Vaccinated employees can contract and spread the virus, but that is rare. However, the more exposure a vaccinated employee has to unvaccinated employees and the public, the greater the risk that the vaccinated employee will become infected. In alignment with current public health guidance, employees who contract the virus must isolate for 10 days. Some will require even longer periods out of the workplace due to continuing illness. Unvaccinated employees who are exposed to the virus must quarantine for a minimum of seven days, while vaccinated employees are not required to quarantine unless they are symptomatic. The county strongly encourages employees to get vaccinated.
- a. Vaccination as an Alternative to Testing – Employees may forego the regular COVID-19 testing if they are fully vaccinated. “Fully vaccinated” means (1) two weeks have elapsed since the

- second dose of a dual-dose vaccination or since obtaining the sole dose of a single-dose vaccination; and (2) the employee has uploaded a copy of their vaccination record into Oracle.
- b. Vaccine Administration – Employees may obtain their vaccination through DHE or from a health care provider or pharmacy of their choice. The vaccine is free regardless of where employees get it. Non-exempt employees who are unable to obtain their vaccine during work hours will be paid one hour per dose if they get the vaccine during unscheduled hours unless they provide proof that the vaccination took more than one hour.
 - c. Reporting Vaccination Status – The second requirement of being fully vaccinated - and avoiding regular COVID-19 tests - is uploading the vaccination card into Oracle. Whether employees obtain their vaccine through DHE or another health care provider, employees are responsible for uploading their vaccination card. When the employee obtains a vaccination through DHE, DHE is acting as a health care provider and will not report individual employee results to HRD or any other department of Johnson County Government for purposes of verifying vaccination status. Employees who have previously voluntarily reported their vaccination status in Oracle or who have uploaded their vaccination card onto the Asset Health website for purposes of earning points under the Wellness Program, are still required to upload their vaccination card into Oracle to be counted as fully vaccinated. Asset Health is not permitted to share employee vaccination status with the county and the voluntary reports did not include proof of vaccination.
 - d. Paid Time Off – Employees who are benefits ineligible will be eligible for up to one shift of paid administrative leave following each dose of the vaccination for illness related to the vaccination. Other employees may use accrued leave or other forms of paid time off available to them.
- 4. Continued Physical Distancing – Both vaccinated and unvaccinated staff are encouraged to continue to maintain physical distance indoors when practicable. Virtual meetings, staggered shifts, and remote work are tools departments should implement as appropriate to the work.
 - 5. Employee Travel – Restrictions on business travel for unvaccinated employees remain in place.
 - 6. Continued Use of Physical Barriers – Plexiglass barriers will be used as appropriate.
 - 7. Facilities – The Facilities Department will continue with its protocols for COVID-19 sanitation and ventilation.

D. Requests for Accommodations

Employees may contact HRD to request accommodation on disability or religious grounds. Requests made to supervisors must be referred to HRD. Employees have the option of being vaccinated or submitting to the periodic testing described above. At this time, both vaccinated and unvaccinated employees must comply with the mask requirements. Masks are particularly important for unvaccinated employees. According to our public health officials, submitting to testing without complying with the mask requirements is not a reasonable alternative to vaccination at this time. HRD will discuss other possible accommodations with employees.

E. Plan Modification

The County Manager may revise this plan as appropriate, in consultation with the Director of DHE and the DHE Local Health Officer.