

UW SPH – STAFF AND SUPERVISOR TELEWORK FAQs (last updated 12/3/21)

To assist staff and their supervisors in finding the answers to their questions, we have divided the FAQ into questions related to the following sections:

- [University-wide policies](#)
- [SPH-specific telework policies & guidance](#)
- [Balancing in-person work and COVID risks](#)
- [Future plans \(including contingency plans\)](#)

Questions related to University-wide policies

1. What happens if I can't work or need to work from home on a day that I was planning to work in-person because I am sick or exposed to COVID (or my kids are sick or required to quarantine or isolate)?

- A. There are a number of legitimate reasons why an individual may need to take a sick day or temporarily switch to remote work. We understand that and want to ensure flexibility during this period. Please coordinate and communicate directly with your supervisor if you need to adjust your arrangement. Please also make sure that you are familiar with this summary of public health guidance so that you know under which circumstances you may be required to work from home: <https://www.ehs.washington.edu/system/files/resources/COVID-19-public-health-flowchart.pdf>.

2. Why did the UW shift to “return to work on campus” in September 2021, when some other regional employers have extended their universal work from home policies to January 2022 and beyond?

- A. The UW's decision to move to remote work in Spring 2020 was based on local, state and national public health guidance to reduce the burden of COVID-19 cases on our health systems. During the early stages of the pandemic, we (and much of the rest of the world) had to resort to community-level non-pharmaceutical interventions due to the lack of effective treatments and vaccines for COVID-19 and limited testing capacity. At the time, we were operating under emergency protocols that waived a number of standard practices, including the requirement that each employee who teleworks have an approved individual telework arrangement in place.

With the widespread availability of high-quality vaccines and testing in our region starting in the spring of 2021, UW central administration made the executive decision to: 1) return to campus for in-person instruction in autumn

2021 and 2) lift the emergency protocols that allowed (near) universal work from home at the discretion of individual employees in September 2021.

This decision was aligned Governor Inslee’s mandate that K-12 schools in WA state return to in-class instruction for Fall 2021. This decision to shift towards in-person instruction was also in alignment with national trends for both K-12 schools and institutions of higher education. Guidance from both the [CDC](#) and the [US Department of Education](#) encouraged returning to in-person instruction to address the increased disparities in post-secondary education caused by remote instruction during the pandemic. Other employers who are not educational institutions did not necessarily have the same motivations for returning to work in-person.

3. Why do I need to have a telework agreement in place/why can’t we just continue to let staff have flexibility to make day-to-day decisions about whether to work on site or remotely depending on what works best for them like we did during AY2020-21?

- A. At the beginning of the pandemic, we were operating under emergency protocols that waived a number of standard practices, including the requirement that each employee who teleworks have an approved individual telework arrangement in place. Telework agreements are a tool to ensure that some affirmative connection between manager/employee around work location has occurred and has been documented.

Telework agreements also serve as a necessary compliance tool and helpful checklist for units to ensure that they and their employees institute telework and remote work in accordance with a matrix of required compliance policies and/or best practices - including state ethics, public records, workers compensation, Fair Labor Standards, and data security.

Telework agreements also serve as a method of shared accountability between managers and employees if performance management or performance expectations are called into question. In many of our formal processes (e.g. union grievance), lack of (or sloppy) documentation regarding telework allowances or expectations can lead to misunderstandings and complications for all parties in disciplinary proceedings.

4. Have the UW’s telework policies been updated to reflect the reality that many more people now want to work from home at least part of the time?

- A. Yes. Pre-pandemic, telework was not very common for staff and the overwhelming majority of the staff who did telework fell into two categories: 100% remote work or very occasional remote work. UW has added a new category of telework, “hybrid” telework, that reflects the new reality that many UW employees want to continue to work from home at least part of the time.

- 5. What decisions related to staff telework were at the discretion of the school?**
- A. In the new University telework policy, discretion is left to the schools regarding:
- Whether or not to have standardized telework work schedules or minimum set days of work on campus for specific job categories across the school;
 - What criteria will be used to determine eligibility for 100% telework.
- 6. Why can't my department or program (or even me and my supervisor) make decisions about 100% telework?**
- A. Per University policy (<https://hr.uw.edu/returntowork/planning-for-fall-quarter-return/determining-eligibility-for-hybrid-or-remote-work/>), 100% remote work agreements require approval from the Office of the Dean. Other than the Dean of the School of Medicine, who has special authorization to delegate this authority, Deans are not permitted to delegate this authority to departments, programs or supervisors.
- 7. Can my entire team (or unit) decide to telework 100% and request an exception from the Dean for 100% telework as a group?**
- A. No; per University policy (<https://hr.uw.edu/returntowork/planning-for-fall-quarter-return/determining-eligibility-for-hybrid-or-remote-work/>), individual telework agreements are required for staff. If conditions require us to adjust to 100% telework, we will do that as a University, and it will apply to everyone. Otherwise, UW states that telework requests must be made on an individual basis.
- 8. Does my telework agreement need to specify which days I will be on campus or can it simply state the number of days per week I will be on campus?**
- A. While the standard UW telework agreement asks you to specify which days of the week you plan to be on campus and remote, you may speak to your supervisor to see whether they would be OK with you simply specifying the number of days you plan to work remotely each week but allowing the days of the week to vary from week to week.
- 9. What if I want to work five days a week on-site/do not have any interest in teleworking?**
- A. You do not need to complete a telework agreement.
- 10. What happens if I don't complete a telework agreement request or my request is not approved?**
- A. If you do not have an approved telework agreement in place by December 31, 2021, please plan to show up in-person for work on January 3, 2022.

11. Per UW policy, are there any staff who are *not* eligible for telework?

- A. The following groups of individuals are not eligible for hybrid or remote work:
- Individuals identified as "essential workers" due to the nature of their work and were already working 100% on-site as of June 30, 2021.
 - Positions where the employee's continued telework negatively impacts team performance.

For more information about eligibility criteria, see the UW HR's [webpage about determining eligibility for hybrid or remote work](#).

12. I work part-time; am I eligible for telework?

- A. Part-time staff may be eligible for telework. Part-time staff should work with their supervisors to create an appropriate proportional schedule of in-person and remote work.

13. I am an Academic Student Employee (ASE); am I eligible for telework, and do I need to complete a telework request form?

- A. Please check with your supervisor and the HR Manager in your department. Due to the nature of the work, ASEs who are conducting research have historically been able to work from various locations. While the CBA (collective bargaining agreement) for ASEs does not require telework agreements, they are often found useful. Departments determine, at the local level, whether to have telework agreements in place.

Questions related to SPH-specific telework policies & guidance

14. What are the SPH-specific telework policies and guidance and how were they developed?

- A. Through a series of conversations over summer 2021 and based on feedback provided by staff (e.g., from google docs at webinars), SPH departmental and OD leadership teams agreed that the school would implement a pilot telework program for fall 2021 based on the following principles:
- Consistent with University-wide guidance and expectations and our core role as an academic unit, most staff would be expected to work at least part-time in-person in Fall 2021.
 - To provide some level of consistency across the school, general guidelines were provided regarding the number of days individuals should aim to work on campus depending on the type of work they do.

- Recognizing that individual circumstances vary considerably, the decision about each individual's hybrid work schedule (anywhere from 1-4 days in-person) would be left to the discretion of the staff member, their supervisor, and their department chair.
- 100% telework arrangements would be reserved for individuals with truly extenuating circumstances, such as:
 - Employees who have a personal medical condition that makes them particularly vulnerable both to acquiring *and* becoming seriously ill from COVID if the employee were to work in-person on campus (typically approved by DSO).
 - Individuals who worked 100% remote prior to COVID and/or lived out of state at the time that they were hired with the understanding that they would be able to work remotely (approved by dean); or
 - Employees who live with an individual who has a medical condition that makes them particularly vulnerable both to acquiring *and* becoming seriously ill from COVID if the employee were to work in-person on campus (approved by dean).
- A school-wide survey of staff and their supervisors would be conducted in late fall 2021 to inform whether the pilot would continue and/or be modified in any way for Winter and Spring 2021.

15. What are the results of the assessment that SPH conducted re: staff and faculty satisfaction with the fall telework arrangements?

- A. Based on input from staff, their supervisors and departmental leaders, we have decided to extend the pilot program for Winter and Spring 2021. Staff may submit requests for telework arrangements for the entire 6 month period of January 1-June 30, 2022.

The results of our Telework Survey for [Staff](#) and [Faculty](#) who supervise staff showed general operational satisfaction with current arrangements and a desire to continue to manage this with flexibility. (The additional qualitative results from the survey have also been shared with the department chairs and the OD leadership team to help inform decision-making around telework arrangements.)

Questions related to balancing in-person work and COVID risks

16. What was the rationale, in terms of COVID risk, for returning to work in-person in Fall 2021, even though COVID (including newer variants) is still circulating both globally and locally?

- A. With the widespread availability of high-quality vaccines and testing in our region starting in the spring of 2021, a decision was made by the UW central administration to return to campus for in-person instruction in autumn 2021 and to lift the emergency protocols that allowed (near) universal work from home at the discretion of individual employees in September 2021. This decision reflected the governor's mandate that K-12 schools in WA state return to in-class instruction for Fall 2021 and also a nation-wide trend for both K-12 schools and institutions of higher ed to shift towards in-person instruction in autumn 2021. Guidance from both the [CDC](#) and the [US Department of Education](#) encouraged returning to in-person instruction to address the increased disparities in post-secondary education caused by remote instruction during the pandemic.

UW has implemented the best practices outlined by the CDC and the US Department of Education to ensure that this return to in-person instruction and work is conducted as safely as possible. This includes vaccine and masking mandates, extensive free testing, aggressive contact tracing and enhanced ventilation in critical areas. Our campus-wide COVID guidance and protocols are informed by and consistent with federal and state guidance, as well as guidance from Public Health Seattle and King County, which has typically promoted even more protective protocols than the CDC and WA DOH during the pandemic.

While we continue to see COVID circulating worldwide and in our local community, the number of COVID cases in the UW community has been lower in 2021 than in 2020, despite a much higher population of students and employees on campus this fall. This is because: 1) vaccinated individuals are less likely to both contract and transmit COVID, 2) wearing face coverings is an effective strategy for reducing transmission of COVID, 3) aggressive contact tracing, and 4) strong adherence to guidance that individuals with symptoms should not come to campus. All of these factors have kept the incidence of COVID lower for UW than for the surrounding community.

As an individual, if you are fully vaccinated, you are significantly less likely to contract COVID if you are exposed to it: the relative risk of acquiring COVID is 7 times lower for vaccinated individuals than for unvaccinated individuals in King County. (<https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/covid-19/data/vaccination-outcomes.aspx>) Even more importantly, those individuals who are vaccinated



who do acquire COVID are much less likely to require hospitalization or to die from COVID than unvaccinated individuals: the relative risk for vaccinated individuals (versus unvaccinated individuals) in King County was 38 times lower for hospitalization and 24 times lower for death in the thirty days prior to November 30, 2021. The University and SPH have in place mechanisms to provide accommodations (UW DSO) and special arrangements (SPH Office of the Dean) for those individuals who have exceptional circumstances that put themselves and their families at higher risk.

The data to date suggest that the measures we have in place on campus have allowed us to return to in-person instruction and flexible in-person work without significant risk to most individuals and that this shift has not contributed to an undue burden for the local healthcare system. Nonetheless, we continue to closely monitor a wide range of metrics (including the number of cases in the UW and surrounding community, the capacity of the local healthcare system and their ability to provide critical services, and the ability of our current vaccines to protect against hospitalizations and death from COVID as new variants emerge. We will also continue to align our protocols with the most up-to-date federal, state, and local public health guidance.

17. Will there continue to be a mask mandate on campus?

- A. Both the SPH and UW leadership teams continue to monitor the situation closely and are committed to ensuring that our policies remain aligned with the most up-to-date public health guidance. Please make sure that you are familiar with the most up to date [campus masking policy](#).

18. How can I stay up to date on the COVID pandemic, local public health guidance, and University policies related to COVID?

- A. The Public Health Seattle and King County website is an excellent source of information about the current status of the COVID pandemic and current public health guidance: <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/covid-19.aspx>

Other outstanding sources of information include the [UW EH&S website](#), the [UW COVID home page](#), and the [SPH COVID website](#).

19. How do I know when I need to stay home from work (e.g., due to illness or COVID exposure)?

- A. Please familiarize yourself with UW EH&S's [flowchart](#) that summarizes COVID-19 public health requirements and guidance to inform quarantine decisions.

20. What should I do if I notice that someone in my workspace is not adhering to UW guidance (e.g., does not have a mask on)?



- A. Please see the [UW Face Covering Policy](#) (see particularly pages 3-5 on “policy enforcement”).
- The first step is **always** to “begin with a polite verbal request” to mention to the individual (whether student, faculty, staff or guest) who is not wearing a face covering that UW has a [face covering policy](#) for all individuals indoors, and to ask them to wear a face covering.
 - If the individual does not have a face covering with them, you can direct them to a [heathy huskies vending machine](#) (locally there are vending machines on the 4th floor of the Magnuson Health Sciences Center or 2nd floor of the South Campus Center).
 - University personnel with ongoing concerns that an individual or group of individuals are not complying with the UW face covering policy should speak with their supervisor, a representative of the academic unit, or report it to the [Environmental Health & Safety Department](#).

21. I can personally do all my work remotely, so why do I need to come into the office at all when coming to campus increases my risk of getting COVID?

- A. We believe that we advance our public mission and our impact best – for our students, for our employees, for the public, and for our patients — by being in community together. With the shift to in-person classes, many members of the SPH team still need to spend at least part of their time on campus. This creates a ripple effect of other support services that will need to be at least partially in-person. Our goal is to ensure that those individuals who need to be on campus at least part-time are not overburdened with responsibilities that would otherwise be shared among everyone on-site.

The exceptions to this are based on individuals who have a higher risk associated with being on campus and fall into two categories:

- (1) By University policy, employees who have a personal medical condition that makes them both particularly vulnerable to acquiring COVID and becoming seriously ill if they work in-person on campus may request an accommodation from the Disability Services Office, DSO, to work 100% remotely.
- (2) By SPH policy, employees who meet one or more the following criteria may request permission to work 100% remote. Per University policy, these requests must be approved by the supervisor, department, and the dean:
 - Employees who live with an individual who has a medical condition that makes them particularly vulnerable both to acquiring *and* becoming seriously ill from COVID if the employee were to work in-person on campus. Individuals who worked 100% remote prior to COVID and/or lived out of state at the time that they were hired with the understanding that they would be able

to work remotely (with approval from their supervisor, department and the dean).

22. I live with an immunocompromised individual; am I eligible to telework 100%?

- A. Employees living with an immunocompromised individual are not eligible for a workplace accommodation through DSO since it does not relate to their own medical condition. However, the School of Public Health is absolutely willing to consider requests for a special arrangement to telework 100% for these individuals because immunocompromised individuals are often unable to mount an immune response to vaccines *and* are often at higher risk for serious illness from COVID. Please submit a request for a special arrangement that explains your circumstances to your department HR Manager that articulates those factors, and we will give it full consideration.

23. I have unvaccinated children and am worried that I will infect them; can I request to telework 100%?

- A. Per University and SPH policy, having children who cannot be vaccinated currently does not qualify an individual to telework 100% since young children as a group are not at high risk for severe illness associated with COVID and we are in a heavily vaccinated community. However, suppose you have an immunocompromised child who cannot be fully vaccinated *and* is at high risk for severe disease, or you have other circumstances that complicate your situation. In those cases, you are welcome to submit a request for a special arrangement to your department HR Manager that articulates those factors; your HR manager will forward this request for a special arrangement to the SPH OD.

Please note that this policy is consistent with current CDC and state guidance state that children should attend K-12 school in-person, reflecting our understanding that children are generally at lower risk for severe disease caused by COVID. Requiring masking in school settings is an effective mechanism for protecting unvaccinated children. Vaccines are now available for children 5-17 through both UW medicine and other providers.

24. I am concerned that being around people who are not vaccinated is potentially unsafe; can I request to telework 100%?

- A. The UW has vaccine mandates for employees (faculty and staff) and students. As a result, a very high percentage of faculty, staff and students at UW are vaccinated. (Per the [UW COVID-19 dashboard](#), >98% of staff and faculty on the UW Seattle campus are fully vaccinated. In addition, as of November 2021, >95% of students on the UW Seattle campus have uploaded their vaccine documentation and >98% of those students are fully vaccinated. As a result of these vaccine mandates and our campus' masking policy, the incidence of COVID

cases at UW remained lower than in the surrounding community during Fall 2021.

Nonetheless, we understand that this is a stressful and challenging time for everyone and that some members of our community are disproportionately affected. UW HR has [excellent resources](#) to help you care for yourself and your family as you manage the back to workplace transition.

25. What work was done to ensure that the ventilation systems in the buildings we occupy at UW are safe?

- A. An overview of how ventilation systems work and changes made in response to COVID can be found [here](#).

26. I work in an “open office” setting. How will I maintain 6 feet of separation from others?

- A. Social distancing is not a requirement (locally or nationally) for workplaces that require vaccinations and masking. Most of the open SPH offices spaces had less than 50% occupancy at any given time during Autumn 2021, due to the high rate of hybrid telework in our school. We anticipate that this lower density will continue throughout Winter and Spring 2022.

27. I work in a building that includes clinical settings; what can I do to prevent potential exposure from patients?

- A. Masks are currently required for everyone in all UW buildings, including ones that are used by patients and the general public. UW Medicine has an outstanding track record of adhering to good practices and an exceptionally low number of workplace-related cases of COVID transmission throughout the pandemic. We are committed to adhering to these same good practices through SPH.

28. I am worried about my safety when eating and drinking at work; what can I do to limit the potential for COVID-transmission if I have to remove my mask to eat or drink during the day?

- A. Please review the guidance that UW EH&S has released regarding safety practices while [eating and drinking on campus](#). Signage in your building will also indicate which spaces are suitable for eating and drinking. Please check with your departmental manager if you have questions.

29. I must take public transportation to work and don't feel safe; can I request to telework 100%?

- A. Relying on public transit does not qualify an individual for 100% telework. However, suppose you have an immunocompromised child, or you



have other circumstances that complicate your situation. In that case, you are welcome to submit an exception request to your department HR Manager that articulates those factors, and we will give it full consideration.

Individuals who take public transportation to work or commute in group settings should particularly review the following recommendations released by Public Health Seattle & King County (PHSKC) about [choosing the right mask for different situations](#).

Questions related to future plans (including contingency plans)

30. Is it possible that the entire campus will shift back to 100% telework?

- A. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is to expect the unexpected. That being said, the UW is unlikely to shift back to 100% telework unless:
- Available vaccines cease to provide strong protection against hospitalizations and death from COVID (i.e., the individual risk to members of our community of working in-person is too high) and/or
 - In-person work and classes at the UW is contributing to high rates of community transmission and/or overwhelming the capacity of our health care system. (i.e., the societal impacts of in-person work are unmanageable).

31. What happens after June 30, 2022?

- A. We will conduct a follow-up schoolwide assessment of how the hybrid telework scenarios have been working for both employees themselves and for other members of the UW SPH community (e.g., our students). At that point, we will use that information (as well as updated UW and public health guidance) to decide whether to continue with the current model or whether changes need to be made.