

**OCHMO COVID Return to Work Guidelines 23 August 2021**  
**(with SSC clarification in italics, 2 September 2021)**

NASA will follow the CDC and State Department guidelines with regards to testing and return to work, with some exceptions. Realizing that there is currently an asymmetric threat with some Centers in areas of very high transmission rates and hospitalizations; those Centers with **excessive breakthrough cases** where they believe on-site transmission is occurring or escalating on-site cases represent a threat to the NASA workforce, have the authority to quarantine vaccinated and unvaccinated employees for purposes of case tracing and quarantine if they believe the situation warrants (cluster of cases, high exposure, etc). In such situations, the quarantined-vaccinated individuals if asymptomatic, a negative COVID test performed between days 4-5, may return after a full 7 days of quarantine. Medical directors should use professional judgment, length of exposure, clusters of cases, and local conditions when exercising this authority and be mindful of potential mission impacts.

***Until informed otherwise, SSC is not a Center with “excessive breakthrough cases”. The COVID Return to Work Guidelines (with SSC clarifications) will be updated with a new version date and a notice will be posted on the SSC Emergency Management link ([Stennis Space Center – SSC Emergency Management \(sscsos.com\)](#)) on the SSC intranet site when/if this status changes.***

For all Centers:

- NASA case tracing will consider employees who have previously contracted and recovered from COVID-19 who subsequently test positive, exhibit symptoms and/or have contact with positive/presumed positive COVID-19 person(s) as a new COVID case/contact regardless of whether they are within 3 months of recovery. This is secondary to high delta transmission in those previously exposed or recovered from prior iterations of the virus.
- NASA will maintain the 72 hour (3 days) return post recovery from the previous edition of the CDC’s guideline, instead of allowing an employee to return to work 24 hours after resolution of symptoms. The reason for this is that the average age of the NASA workforce is higher than the population for whom this guidance was established, the delta variant has a much higher Ro, and the risk to NASA missions is higher than an average employment risk.

All guidance and return requirements assume that employees are required to maintain social distancing, follow current mask guidance, and perform hand sanitization. We will not be policing or adding this guidance to contracts, but expect everyone to follow the recommendations where practicable in order to maintain the safety of our personnel, and continued work on our missions.

*SSC Supervisors shall submit an SSC Form 602, “Request for Medical Certification Exam”, to the SSC Clinic to request an employee who is either COVID positive or has had a contact with a COVID positive/presumed positive person be cleared by the SSC Clinic for Return To On-Site Work in accordance with the guidance below. The SSC Medical Director shall have the final say on the application of the following Return To On-Site Work guidance. Unique circumstances for a case may warranted a variance from the below to reduce the risk of infection to the on-site workforce.*

*SSC supervisors may request mission essential employees who are on quarantine (due to contact with a COVID positive/presumed positive person) be tested (or submit test results) and evaluated for Return To On-Site Work by SSC clinic staff following the guidelines below by submitting a request to Stephen O’Neill ([stephen.g.o'neill@nasa.gov](mailto:stephen.g.o'neill@nasa.gov)) and/or David Lorange ([David.k.lorange@nasa.gov](mailto:David.k.lorange@nasa.gov)).*

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Scenario	Return Requirements
<p>1. Employee has tested positive for COVID-19 <i>(whether previously vaccinated or not)</i></p>	<p>a. At least 3 days have passed since recovery, defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and improvement in symptoms, <b><u>AND</u></b></p> <p>b. At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared, <b>AND</b></p> <p>c. At least 20 days since discharge if hospitalized or if history of immunocompromised state</p> <p><a href="https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/disposition-hospitalized-patients.html">https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/disposition-hospitalized-patients.html</a></p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p>d. For persons who <u>never develop symptoms</u>, isolation and other precautions can be discontinued 10 days after the date of their first positive test for COVID-19.</p> <p><a href="https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/end-home-isolation.html">https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/end-home-isolation.html</a></p>
<p>2. Employee has not taken a COVID-19 test but does exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 or the flu (and has not been hospitalized) <i>(whether previously vaccinated or not)</i></p>	<p>a. At least 3 days have passed since recovery, defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and improvement in symptoms</p> <p><b><u>AND</u></b></p> <p>b. At least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.</p> <p><a href="https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/end-home-isolation.html">https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/end-home-isolation.html</a></p>
<p>3. Employee exhibits symptoms of COVID-19 or the flu (and has not been hospitalized) but had a negative COVID-19 PCR test <i>on day 5 or later from the start of symptoms (whether previously vaccinated or not)</i></p>	<p>a. At least 3 days have passed since recovery defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and improvement in symptoms</p> <p><b><u>AND</u></b></p> <p>b. At least full 7 days have passed since the symptoms first appeared.</p> <p><a href="https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/scientific-brief-options-to-reduce-quarantine.html">https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/science/science-briefs/scientific-brief-options-to-reduce-quarantine.html</a></p>

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<p>4. An <i>unvaccinated</i> employee who has been identified as a close/tracing contact, or has a known exposure to COVID, or has a member of their household who has tested positive or exhibits signs of COVID-19. <i>(This also applies to fully vaccinated employees at Centers <u>with excessive COVID breakthrough cases.</u>)</i></p>	<p>a. Self-quarantine for at least 10 days if no testing is performed <i>and remains asymptomatic.</i></p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p>b. The employee may be tested (using RT-PCR) on days <i>5 or later</i> after known exposure, and if the test is negative, the employee may return to work after 7 full days of quarantine, assuming they remain asymptomatic, and will follow strict mask protocol. <b>AND,</b></p> <p>c. Still monitor for COVID-19 symptoms for 14 days following an exposure and if experience such, should be clinically evaluated for COVID-19, including SARS-CoV-2 testing, if indicated.</p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p>d. For an employee with a household contact who tests positive, they should self-isolate away from the positive individual, if possible. Their quarantine period begins after the infected household contact recovers (24 hours after their household contact is asymptomatic and without fever). Return to work may be either after 7 days full quarantine with negative RT-PCR testing of the employee, or 10 days without testing, as above. If the household contact receives a negative PCR test, the employee may return to work immediately assuming they themselves are asymptomatic.</p> <p>e. For critical personnel <b><u>only</u></b> (Fire, EMS, Medical, Security, Staffing of Critical Hardware)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Those NOT fully vaccinated who have prolonged close contact with a confirmed SARS-CoV-2 person, need to be excluded from work for 14 days after last exposure, if no testing is done.</li><li>2. After prolonged close contact with a confirmed SARS-CoV-2 person, regardless of vaccination status, could have a series of two viral tests performed <math>\geq 24</math> hours apart. The first test can be performed starting on day 4 after exposure, and the second one must be a RT-PCR performed on day 5 or 6. If both are negative, employee may return to work after 7 full days of quarantine as long as they remain asymptomatic, are in appropriate PPE* while on-site, and temperature checks reveal no fever.</li><li>3. For ALL critical personnel who show symptoms of COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status or known contact with a positive SARS-CoV-2 person, it is recommended that they should be tested immediately for SARS-CoV. Decisions must then be based on the actual suspected diagnosis.</li></ol>
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	<p>*Appropriate PPE refers to personal protective equipment appropriate to the task and risk, in the example above this is either a two layer cloth mask, surgical mask, or N-95 mask or its equivalent. For direct patient care or where social distancing is not possible, an N-95 or surgical mask is recommended. Neck “gaiters” and <i>masks with an exhalation valve</i> are not appropriate PPE for indoor areas.</p> <p>**Regardless of suspected or confirmed immunity, healthcare personnel should always wear all recommended PPE when caring for patients.</p> <p><a href="https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assesment-hcp.html">https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assesment-hcp.html</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/testing-healthcare-personnel.html">https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/testing-healthcare-personnel.html</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/faq.html#anchor-handling">https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/faq.html#anchor-handling</a></p>
<p>5. Employee who is fully vaccinated at Centers <b><u>without excessive COVID breakthrough cases</u></b>, who has been identified as a close/tracing contact, or has a known exposure to COVID, or has a member of their household who has tested positive or exhibits signs of COVID-19</p>	<p>a. An employee who has been fully vaccinated with a COVID-19 vaccine are not required to quarantine at Centers without excessive breakthrough cases IF they meet ALL three of the following criteria:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Are fully vaccinated (<math>\geq 2</math> weeks after their second dose in a 2-dose series or <math>\geq 2</math> weeks following receipt of one dose of a single-dose vaccine of FDA approved (<i>FDA “Approved” and “Emergency Use Authorizations”</i>) vaccines.</li> </ol> <p align="center"><b><u>AND</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Have remained asymptomatic since the current exposure</li> </ol> <p align="center"><b><u>AND</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Fully vaccinated person who do not quarantine should still monitor for COVID-19 symptoms for 14 days following an exposure and follow strict mask protocol and if experience such should be clinically evaluated for COVID-19, including SARS-CoV-2 testing, if indicated.</li> </ol> <p><a href="https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinateda.guidance.html">https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinateda.guidance.html</a></p>

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<p>6. Domestic Travel For NASA Employees who are fully vaccinated</p>	<p>a. Fully vaccinated travelers, defined as two weeks after receiving the last recommended dose of vaccine, do not need to get a SARS-CoV-2 viral test before or after domestic travel, unless testing is required by local, state, or territorial health authorities.</p> <p>b. Fully vaccinated travelers do not need to self-quarantine following domestic travel.</p> <p><a href="https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html">https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html</a></p>
<p>7. Domestic Travel for NASA Employees who are <b>not</b> fully vaccinated</p>	<p>a. Follow the requirements for the local destination in regards to testing. If required, get tested 1-3 days before your flight. Please note that PCR tests take 24-48 hours to return, so plan accordingly to ensure you will have results in hand when presenting to the airport. The cost of testing is reimbursable and should be turned in with travel receipts, or you may use the NASA testing contract for direct billing to the agency for official agency travel.</p> <p>b. Upon return, you may get tested again between 3-5 days after travel. The CDC recommends that you stay home for 7 days after travel if your test is negative and 10 days if you elect to not to get tested. This is not a mandate, but a precautionary measure. Work with your supervisor as to whether your work requires you to return on site immediately, or if you are able to telework for the period recommended. The cost of testing is reimbursable and should be turned in with travel receipts, or you may use the NASA testing contract for direct billing to the agency for official agency travel.</p> <p>c. For Civil Servants, NASA has contracted with Quest Labs for COVID-19 tests for approved NASA travel. Once you are placed on travel orders, a document will be sent with instructions on how to have the test delivered to your home both before travel (for those areas that require a negative test within 72 hours) and after travel. NASA will cover the cost of these tests associated with official government travel directly. You may also obtain a COVID test locally, and include the cost of the test for travel reimbursement if it is for official NASA travel.</p> <p>d. It is imperative to check state and local conditions and restrictions before traveling within the U.S, as many states and municipalities have further restricted or placed enhanced testing guidelines due to escalating cases in their area. Follow local restrictions and guidelines where possible.</p>

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	<p><a href="https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-during-covid19.html">https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-during-covid19.html</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/testing-air-travel.html">https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/testing-air-travel.html</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.flyhealthy.gov">https://www.flyhealthy.gov</a></p>
<p>8. International Travel by NASA Employees, International Partners, or other visitors to NASA Centers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. For NASA employees traveling internationally, it is imperative to check conditions and restrictions at the destination and in layover countries. Information may be available from the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs Country Information webpages or through the airlines.</li> <li>b. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) requires travelers inbound to the United States regardless of vaccination status to have a negative COVID test no more than 3 days prior to boarding the aircraft. You will not be permitted to board the aircraft without a negative test. This is for all locations with inbound flights to the U.S. The aforementioned Quest Labs COVID test cannot be used or delivered for the test required in the host country, but may be ordered after arrival into the United States for post travel testing if the traveler is on government travel orders.</li> <li>c. Many countries require a negative test performed 72 hours prior to travel and entry into their country. It is recommended to have an RT-PCR test performed as opposed to a rapid antigen test, due to its higher sensitivity. Upon return to the United States, repeat testing should be performed 3-5 days after entry regardless of vaccination status.</li> <li>d. Fully vaccinated travelers do not need to self-quarantine in the United States following international travel. However, any fully vaccinated person who experiences symptoms consistent with COVID-19 should isolate themselves from others, be clinically evaluated for COVID-19, and tested for SARS-CoV-2 if indicated. The symptomatic fully vaccinated person should inform their healthcare provider of their vaccination status at the time of presentation to care.</li> <li>e. Travelers who are not fully vaccinated need to self isolate for 7 full days if the return test is negative, and 10 days if no test is obtained.</li> <li>f. Self-monitor for COVID-19 symptoms; isolate and get tested if you develop symptoms. Work with your supervisor as to whether your work requires you to return on site immediately, or if you are able to</li> </ul>

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	<p>telework for the period recommended. Receipts for testing secondary to travel can be turned in with your other travel receipts, or you may obtain testing using the direct billing NASA contract.</p> <p>g. For International Partners traveling from outside the United States to a NASA Center: Those countries which currently have quarantine or specific restrictions posted by the CDC or State Department must abide by those restrictions. Upon entering the United States, the travelers not subject to more restrictive requirements based on their country of origin should get tested between 3-5 days after travel <u>AND</u> isolate for a full 7 days in their billeted quarters. If the test is negative you may report on site at a NASA center after the 7th day. If you do not get tested, you should isolate the full 10 days before reporting on site. If you are two weeks post vaccination, and meet the 4b. requirements above, you do not have to quarantine post travel. You should be asymptomatic (no fever, cough, sore throat, etc) and should have the appropriate mask in place and maintain social distancing and frequent hand washing/sanitation. All travelers should maintain vigilance with self-observation for any signs or symptoms in the week following their arrival, and maintain PPE and social distancing while on site.</p> <p>h. The Agency reserves the right to check any and all visitors at the badging office for proof of testing and may deny access for non-compliance.</p> <p>i. Follow local restrictions and guidelines where possible.</p> <p><a href="https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/testing-air-travel.html">https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/testing-air-travel.html</a></p> <p><a href="https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/COVID-19-Country-Specific-Information.html">https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/COVID-19-Country-Specific-Information.html</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.flyhealthy.gov">https://www.flyhealthy.gov</a></p>
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Note: For Centers that already have rapid antigen tests in place for surveillance, those tests may be used for their current purpose (general surveillance, etc) and RT-PCR may be used when clinical suspicion warrants or to augment as needed.

Note: For mission critical travel to states that currently have their own quarantine orders: federal employees and contractors doing *mission critical work* are not bound by the state quarantine orders. A letter from the COR/Center Contracting Office is required for contractors and a letter from the Center Director is required for civil servants that explains the nature of the critical work. Please take

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those letters with you when you travel. It is advisable to check with the hotel to see what documentation they may require in those states that have enacted their own quarantine orders.

Note: These exceptions to the State and local quarantine apply to official mission critical work only for agency civil servants, contractors, and International Partners on official business.

Note: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and local restrictions are fluid and may change due to escalation of the disease in a particular country or area. It is highly advisable to check the information in the area you are traveling frequently for any changes.

Note: For international partners traveling to the US- The State Department currently is restricting travel or entry from areas with high cases of COVID-19. However, there is an exemption under the President's Executive order (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/25/proclamation-on-the-suspension-of-entry-as-immigrants-and-non-immigrants-of-certain-additional-persons-who-pose-a-risk-of-transmitting-coronavirus-disease>) for critical work at the behest of the U.S. government, which would apply for those traveling to work on NASA missions. Please contact the Office of International and Interagency Relations (OIIR) for a letter that would be required to gain this exemption. Although the exception allows for entry into the United States, the expectations from the CDC regarding testing and isolation prior to coming on site are to be adhered to.

Note: The guidance may or may not match the currently available scientific data. Where possible, we have aligned as best as possible, but deviations may be required due to the mission, the availability of the tests, the ability to get results in a timely manner, or for other circumstances.

All guidance is subject to change as the State Department, CDC, or individual states and territories adjust accordingly.