

Travel FAQ's

Recently, the County announced the need for employees to quarantine after travel if they engage in voluntary, non-essential travel to locations that contain a high-spread of COVID-19 – this could be locally, nationwide, or internationally. The purpose of this is to ensure that all employees are keeping others safe in the workplace. The intent is not to direct, stop, or monitor an employee's ability to vacation, but to keep employees aware of the need to keep the workplace safe, which is something to which we all contribute. No supervisor should deny an employee's vacation request where the travel is deemed high-risk, but only deny a request on the normal basis of business needs of the Department. As the situation is fluid, employees need to keep their Departments apprised of situations that may place others at risk. The simple message is "Think before you travel."

1. I would like to take a vacation, are there any restrictions due to COVID-19?

Employees are permitted to use their annual leave to take vacations and are permitted to travel; however, employees should avoid non-essential travel to high-risk destinations. When employees travel to high-risk destinations, they will not be permitted to return to work for 14 consecutive calendar days upon their return and will be required to quarantine. Any employees exhibiting COVID-19-like symptoms after returning from a high-risk travel destination should get tested.

2. Why has this mandatory quarantine period been put in place?

Travel to high-risk destinations places individuals at risk for contracting COVID-19. In order to protect our successful containment of COVID-19, the mandatory quarantine period is being implemented to decrease the risk of spreading the virus to others in the workplace.

3. How many cases of COVID-19 have been identified in the Pima County employee population?

As of Friday, September 25, 2020, the total number of the County's 7,000 employees who have tested positive for COVID-19 is 115 employees. This represents all cases beginning from the first identified cases in March 2020. The vast majority of these cases were contracted outside of the workplace and represents employees from 24 of the County's 55 Departments.

4. What is non-essential travel?

Non-essential travel refers to travel that is considered tourism or recreational in nature; travel not deemed necessary.

5. What is considered a high-risk destination?

A high-risk destination is not just a location that is experiencing significant community spread, but could be one that hosts events conducive to the spread of COVID-19. For instance, going to Las Vegas to celebrate at a bachelorette party on the strip could be deemed high risk while going to Las Vegas to spend time at a family's member's home, may not, when practicing all safety measures. It is important to note that a destination can change to a high-risk area at any point during the employee's travel due to a change in community spread or unplanned events.

6. What factors should be considered in determining whether a location is high-risk?

Employees are encouraged to make good decisions to keep themselves and the workplace safe. The County does not intend to monitor an employee's vacation plans, but requests that employees share their vacation plans if the destination or events at that destination could likely place the employee at a higher risk for contracting COVID-19. Determinations will be made on a case-by-case basis, weighing the destination of travel and the anticipated travel arrangements, accommodations, contact with public, etc. Therefore, practicing safety protocols during travel is of utmost importance. If the employee has COVID-19 concerns affecting their safety, they should notify their Appointing Authority so a determination can be made as to whether the employee will need to quarantine upon their return.

7. What if I am travelling by car, does each state I travel through need to be determined for high-risk?

If you are travelling through a designated state for a limited duration through the course of travel, that state does not need to be included in making an assessment for high-risk travel. Safety precautions should be taken for any limited duration stops in those states, i.e. rest stops, re-fueling, meals.

Similarly, if you are flying and have a lay-over of a limited duration through the course of travel, that state does not need to be included in making an assessment for high-risk travel.

8. What should I do before travelling?

First and foremost, employees should act reasonably and responsibly in determining travel destinations. Employees should communicate any concerns for travel with their supervisor. If the travel destination is an obvious location for a high level of transmission (overseas, a cruise, a rally in California), employees should communicate that to their supervisor so appropriate measures can be taken for the employee's need to quarantine. The goal is for employees to make safe decisions and not put themselves at risk.

Employees should keep informed about the current spread of COVID-19 and whether the positivity rate is increasing for their intended destination. Factors to take into consideration for domestic travel (whether locally or out-of-state) are the reported positive COVID-19 rates for the area you visit. It is recommended to research state and city or county websites and local public health department websites that track COVID-19 cases. Another factor that can be used, but not determinative, to consider for out-of-state travel is whether the destination has a higher number of cases than Arizona in the last 7 days. You can check the CDC map at https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases_casesinlast7days. Due to the fluid nature of COVID-19 case reports, determinations as to high-risk areas will change over time.

For international travel, a map of high-risk destination countries can be found on the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/map-and-travel-notice.html> or the U.S. Department of State – Bureau of Consular Affairs at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages.html>. Travel to Mexico is currently deemed high-risk.

9. How will it be determined whether a destination is high-risk?

Where an employee is unsure whether a specific location is high-risk or sees that a specific area has a recent elevated number of cases (within 7 days of travel), they should discuss the travel with their supervisor to determine

whether they can return to work after the travel or need to quarantine. The supervisor must notify an Appointing Authority of any known travel so the Appointing Authority is aware and can assess the situation if necessary. Appointing Authorities can discuss travel destinations with the Public Health Department if they have questions or need additional information or with the employee to get a better understanding of the travel in order to make a determination. If it is unclear whether a destination is a high-risk travel destination, the Appointing Authority can contact the Chief Medical Officer.

10. If my voluntary non-essential travel is deemed high-risk, does this mean that I cannot travel?

No. Employees can travel to high-risk destinations; however, upon their return, the employee can expect to quarantine for 14 consecutive calendar days, prior to their return to work.

11. If I am required to quarantine due to the voluntary non-essential travel to a high-risk area, am I paid?

If you are required to quarantine due to voluntary non-essential travel to a high-risk destination, the employee is required to use their vacation leave. Where the employee does not have sufficient vacation leave to cover the 14-day quarantine period, the quarantine time will be unpaid.

12. Am I permitted to use the County's paid quarantine leave, pandemic leave, FFCRA/FEPST (federal), or sick leave if required to quarantine due to a voluntary non-essential travel to a high-risk area?

You are not permitted to use the County's paid quarantine leave, pandemic leave or sick leave to quarantine as a result of a voluntary non-essential travel to a high-risk area. FFCRA leave is only permitted for the use of the quarantine due to travel if the employee has been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine due to concerns related to COVID-19. (A doctor's note authorizing quarantine is required.)

13. Am I permitted to telecommute due to a quarantine resulting from voluntary non-essential travel to a high-risk area?

No. Going to a high-risk area is not a reason to get telecommuting approved.

Employees will not be permitted to telecommute for the 14-day quarantine period as a result of voluntary non-essential travel, absent extenuating circumstances.

14. What are extenuating circumstances for travel that would permit an employee to telecommute during the 14-day quarantine period?

Some examples could include travel to a high-risk area for medical care, parental shared custody, a funeral, or some other extraordinary circumstance. Permission to telecommute for one of these reasons must be approved by the County Administrator.

15. What safety precautions should I take to reduce chances of getting sick if I choose to travel during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Regardless if travel is to a low-risk or high-risk destination, the following precautions are recommended for travel during the pandemic:

- **Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you have been in a public place, touching surfaces frequently touched by others, blowing your nose, coughing, and sneezing, and before touching your face or eating.**
- **If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub your hands together until they feel dry.**
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.**
- **Avoid close contact with others, keeping 6 feet of distance.**
- **Wear a cloth face covering in public.**
- **Cover coughs and sneezes.**
- **Pick up food at drive-throughs, curbside at restaurants, or stores, or pack your own food.**
- **Make sure you are up to date with your routine vaccinations, including the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine and the seasonal flu vaccine.**

16. Can I return to work early than 14 consecutive calendar days if I test negative?

No. The 14-day consecutive calendar day quarantine period is required as this is the amount of time that it could take for COVID-19 to appear should an individual come into contact with the virus.

17. I already purchased tickets for travel, what should I do?

If you have concerns of contracting COVID-19 due to the destination you are traveling or the planned events in which you will be participating, you should discuss your vacation plans with your supervisor and/or Appointing Authority to make a determination of whether or not you will be required to quarantine upon your return.

18. I am a supervisor, should I be asking staff where they are going when they request vacation time?

No. The onus is on the employee to act reasonably and responsibly. Where an employee has concerns for contracting COVID-19 due to their voluntary non-essential travel, they should discuss the destination/arrangements with their supervisor so a decision can be made as to whether or not the employee is required to quarantine upon return.

19. My employee is currently in Mexico, must they immediately quarantine upon their return?

Supervisors and/or Appointing Authorities should speak to employees returning from Mexico to discuss the safety of the employee's travel so a determination can be made as to whether the employee needs to quarantine. Concerns to address would be whether safety protocols were followed (frequently washing hands, staying 6 feet away from others, wearing a mask, avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth), attendance at large gatherings (50 or more people), contact with any known positive COVID-19 cases, congregating in public places, or any other condition that may have put the employee at risk.

The County is requesting that employees: Think before you travel and make safe decisions.