

Workplace Return Date Extended to Feb. 28, 2022

Aug 17, 2021



The Workplace Return Team – in close collaboration with members from Corporate Health & Safety and our medical staff – continues to monitor a number of COVID-19-related factors across our five-state service territory to determine our workplace return date. With the following in mind, the Business Continuity Management (BCM) and Executive Council agreed that the return date be extended to no sooner than **February 28, 2022**:

- COVID-19 case rates are again trending upward due to the Delta variant
- Guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Increase in the number of the counties in our service territory showing substantial or high transmission rates in the CDC's color-coded [COVID-19 Data Tracker](#)
- A similar approach by our peer utilities when considering the workplace return date
- Feedback from employees and leadership indicates that employees who are continuing to work from home are doing so effectively

Update to Mask Policy

On July 27, the CDC changed its guidance to recommend that regardless of vaccination status, masks be worn indoors in areas with substantial and high COVID-19 transmission rates.

According to the CDC's COVID-19 Data Tracker, most counties in our five-state service territory now have substantial or high transmission rates. For this reason, and to align with CDC guidance – which we have followed since the beginning of the pandemic – employees are **required** to wear masks inside FirstEnergy facilities, regardless of vaccination status.

This indoor mask policy is effective August 18 with the following guidelines:

- Masks must be worn by employees, contractors and visitors until the COVID-19 transmission rates in our five states return to low or moderate as demonstrated by the CDC's Data Tracker.
- If transmission rates improve, mask policies can be lifted on a state-by-state basis.
- The Health Emergency Task Force will monitor the Data Tracker and provide notice to directors and above every other Thursday evening to advise if the mask policy applies in their state for the following two weeks. Directors will notify employees on Friday if the mask policy is still in effect for the following Monday.

The following exceptions apply to the mask requirement:

- While eating or drinking
- Wearing a face covering on the job is against documented industry best practices
- Wearing a face covering is not advisable for health purposes
- Wearing a face covering is a violation of a company's safety policies
- There is a practical reason a face covering cannot be worn by an employee
- An employee is working alone in a walled office or cubicle or alone in the cab of a FirstEnergy vehicle
- An employee is working on the turbine floor or boiler room of a power plant

Other notable Items:

Tax Implications

Taxes are generally withheld from employees' paychecks based on work location. During the pandemic, taxes were withheld for employees as if they were reporting to their normal company work location. In response to increased remote work due to COVID-19, state governments in our service territory are announcing tax withholding changes. As a result, each state is being reviewed for appropriate changes to our procedures. For example, in Ohio, beginning Jan. 1, 2022, employers must withhold taxes based on employees' actual work locations, which will impact employees who work full-time or part-time from home. As we approach the end of 2021, more details will be provided regarding taxes related to your work location.

Mileage

Mileage reimbursement policies have not changed. When expensing mileage, an employee must still deduct the miles that make up their commute from home to their designated work location. Employees who work from home continue to have a company facility as their designated work location.

General Office Parking

The General Office parking garage permits will remain operational. Automatic payroll deductions, which have been suspended since April 3, 2020, will **not** resume at this time. Permit holders will be notified via email when the suspension ends and automatic deductions resume.

Meetings

In-person meetings should only be held if there is a critical business need. Regardless of their vaccination status, employees must wear masks for all indoor meetings. Social distancing is not a substitution for wearing a mask.

There are no restrictions on outdoor meetings, including those held in a tent, pavilion or open-air shelter. Masks and social distancing are not required but using hand sanitizer and proper cleaning are still recommended.

For indoor and outdoor meetings, boxed meals and individually packaged foods are encouraged. Please avoid serving buffet meals when possible.

Vaccines

While the COVID-19 vaccine is not mandatory, eligible employees are encouraged to consider getting vaccinated to protect themselves and others.

Got your shot? Employees who have received a COVID-19 vaccine are asked to voluntarily report their vaccine status in [Safe Workplace](#). This information will aid in contact tracing when employees report symptoms or positive cases of COVID-19 during the medical illness screening process.

And remember, new this year in our Healthy Living program is an incentive for employees receiving any vaccine recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), such as those for flu, COVID-19 or shingles. All COVID-19 vaccine doses are rewardable, including those received prior July 1. See [here](#) for more information on this year's HealthyLiving Program.

For more details, the CDC provides [key information](#)* about the vaccine.

Employees can find more information on the company's response to COVID-19 on the *FirstEnergy Today* portal, the [Corporate Health & Safety SharePoint site](#) or [MyFirstRewards.com](#). Please print and post important information for employees who do not access the portal routinely.

Workforce of the Future

We recognize that expectations and business needs have changed a great deal since March 2020 when approximately half of our workforce was required to work from home. We have learned a lot about remote work during the pandemic and as a result, have been evaluating what the workplace will look like moving forward. This includes looking at whether certain business units can continue working remotely, if employees need to be on-site full-time, or if a hybrid approach is best.

Earlier this year, the Workplace Return Team worked with company leaders to determine if the work done in their business units required employees to be on-site full time, remote full time or hybrid, which was some combination of the two. Since that time, the Team has simplified this into two categories: on-site and mobile.

On-site and Mobile: What Do They Mean?

An **On-site** employee's primary work location is a FirstEnergy site as dictated by business need. Their role generally requires them to work on-site three or more days per week at an assigned space unless occasional flexibility is needed.

A **Mobile** employee's primary work location is at home – but they may visit a facility for in-person collaboration needs up to two days a week. Mobile includes the previous **Hybrid and Remote** designations.

For some tasks, working on-site is necessary to meet business needs, while other work might be effectively completed from a home office. In the coming months, your supervisors will be discussing with you the designation that corresponds with your role and the business need.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach, and we know that employees like flexible work options – but determining what works best for each business unit and individual employees takes time. Leaders will continue to assess work arrangements and their employees' needs on an ongoing basis and make adjustments as required. Adjustments could include, for example, changes to the number of days employees work from home or on-site, requiring all employees to be on-site for specific work activities – like department meetings – or implementing a calendar for better visibility into their team's working hours and locations to ensure we remain responsive to customer and coworker needs.

It's important to remember, that when employees do return to the workplace, not all employees will be required to be on-site on that first day. As we approach the Feb. 28 date, leaders will discuss with employees the return expectations.

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