

Children's Services Agency (CSA)

May 27, 2020 All Staff Town Hall Meeting

Questions & Answers

Issued June 25, 2020

NOTE: Answers are effective as of 6/17/20 and are subject to change due to the fluid nature of COVID-19.

COMMUNICATIONS

Question: *Will the PowerPoint slides be available for viewing later?*

Answer: The PowerPoint slides will be made available to staff. The PowerPoint is also available via the following SharePoint link: [CSA: All Staff Meeting, May 27](#).

Question: *Some COVID-related practices during the pandemic have varied across the state and between local offices. Will central office or county offices determine policies to ensure consistent, safe work environments for staff if/when they return to their offices?*

Answer: Central office and local offices will work as a team to provide as much consistency as possible, recognizing differences in local conditions, resources, and circumstances. If there are concerns regarding conflicting information, please escalate the issue to your Business Service Center (BSC) analyst. If concerns remain, you may contact the [CSA Town Hall mailbox](#).

COVID-19

Question: *How should youth be safely transported to and from a Child Caring Institution (CCI) when there are known COVID-positive youth already in the facility?*

Answer: Safe transport to and from CCIs is critically important. There should be no unprotected exposure to staff or other residents during the transfer process. CI 20-076 provides guidelines for safely transporting youth. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has also issued [guidelines for congregate care](#).

Entering a facility where youth have tested positive does not constitute exposure to COVID-19. The staff person transporting the youth to the facility would need to have close contact with COVID-positive youth/individuals at the facility to be exposed to COVID-19. The CDC defines *close contact* as “anyone who has been within 6 feet of a person infected with the virus for a prolonged period of time, as well as those who have had direct contact with the infected person’s secretions.”

Youth who have tested positive for COVID-19 should be under quarantine and isolation and should not have any contact with the general population. Therefore, a staff person transporting a youth to or from the facility should not have close contact or be exposed to anyone with COVID-19.

COVID HAZARD PAY

Question: Why is the COVID hazard pay that Field Team Workers (FTWs) are receiving less than the pandemic unemployment assistance (PUA) that other staff are receiving while on temporary layoff through the Work Share Program?

Answer: When the COVID hazard pay was determined, the temporary layoffs and participation in the Work Share Program had not been determined or implemented. There was no way to predict that the state was going to participate in the Work Share Program when department leadership was advocating for frontline staff to receive COVID hazard pay.

Question: Will COVID hazard pay end when the stay-at-home order is lifted?

Answer: The COVID hazard pay will end when the stay-at-home order, as extended, ends.

Question: Why is the COVID hazard pay prorated if FTWs take time off?

Answer: This decision was made outside of MDHHS as these letters of understanding were being negotiated. Employees using leave still receive their full salary, but the COVID hazard pay will be prorated for the hours during the pay period that the FTW was in regular (REG) work status.

HIRING/HUMAN RESOURCES

Question: When will the hiring freeze end?

Answer: This will be a decision made by the State Budget Office (SBO). It is likely that the state will experience hiring limitations for the foreseeable future. Exceptions can still be sought by working through Office of Human Resources (OHR).

Question: Why are interviews still being held to fill vacant positions while existing staff are being temporarily laid off?

Answer: While budgetary savings created a need for furlough days, some positions still need to be filled to meet operational needs. All positions being filled at this time have received an exception from the SBO to be filled.

Question: How will the budget deficits impact staffing in fiscal year (FY) 2021? Are more layoffs or furlough days anticipated?

Answer: At this time, there is no way to know what action may be needed until the FY21 budget is approved by the legislature. The budget deficit is sizeable; additional action may be necessary.

Question: Are temporary layoff days (TLDs) or the state budget impacting raises? I have not received my two year raise and it is past my two-year hire date.

Answer: Step increases and annual increases should not be affected by TLDs or the state budget. If you need additional assistance regarding your specific situation, please contact Mike DeRose (DeroseM@michigan.gov).

WORK SHARE PROGRAM (LAYOFF/FURLOUGH)

Question: How will the temporary layoff days (TLD) affect those off work on medical leave or maternity leave?

Answer: Employees on leave will not record temporary layoff days while on leave.

Question: Can workers be assigned new cases on their layoff days?

Answer: Workers may be assigned cases that do not need immediate attention on their layoff days. Any cases requiring immediate action should go to someone in work status. With 50% of staff off work each Monday and Friday, there is no way to avoid assignment of non-urgent cases to staff on their layoff day.

Question: Are staff guaranteed to be eligible for unemployment through the Work Share Program? I have heard of people outside of the state being rejected because their income was too great.

Answer: Most staff will qualify. Some factors, such as too much supplemental income or not enough earnings in the prior quarter, could make an employee ineligible. For questions regarding supplemental income, see the SUPPLEMENTAL INCOME section below.

Question: Was seniority considered when assigning furlough days? Some senior staff did not receive the day they requested, while probationary staff did.

Answer: The rules governing TLDs are outlined in the Civil Service Regulations. There is no requirement to use seniority. This issue has been noted for consideration if future TLDs are necessary.

Question: Will employees who were on alternate work schedules be able to return to their regular schedule after the TLDs end?

Answer: We expect the rescission of alternate work schedules to be lifted after TLDs expire.

Question: Will FTWs be eligible for the Work Share Program if it is still available once FTW positions are no longer needed?

Answer: If FTW positions are ended prior to the Work Share Program ending, we will work with Office of the State Employer (OSE) to determine how to address this situation and other related issues.

Question: Centralized Intake has staff working their layoff day and changing their layoff day on some weeks. Is that allowed?

Answer: In rare circumstances and with approval from OHR, layoff days can be shifted for unique operational needs.

Question: *What should staff do if they have a court hearing scheduled on their layoff day?*

Answer: Workers who are scheduled for layoff on a day when they have a scheduled court hearing should speak to local office management. In some cases, layoff days can be shifted within the same week, with appropriate approval and notification.

UNEMPLOYMENT PAYMENTS

Question: *How much will I receive in state unemployment benefits and pandemic unemployment?*

Answer: Most employees will receive a prorated state benefit and a full \$600 benefit for each week they participate in the Work Share Program.

Question: *Who should staff contact with issues regarding their state unemployment or pandemic unemployment assistance (PUA) payments?*

Answer: Issues with receiving payments need to go to Unemployment Insurance Agency (UIA). OHR and OSE do not have access to employee's UIA accounts and would be unable to assist.

Question: *Do staff who are participating in the Work Share Program need to set up a MiWAM account or call MARVIN to receive their unemployment benefits?*

Answer: For staff participating in the Work Share Program, everything will occur automatically. There is no need to create a MiWAM account or call MARVIN.

Question: *Can taxes be taken out of our unemployment benefits, or will staff be responsible for paying any taxes due when they file their 2020 taxes?*

Answer: No taxes or deductions will be taken from state unemployment benefits or pandemic unemployment payments received under the Work Share Program. This is part of the Work Share Program and was not a decision made by MDHHS. The Work Share Program does not permit taxes or deductions to be withheld. Employees will receive an IRS Form 1099-G in early 2021 from the UIA for tax purposes, and these funds will be considered taxable income for 2020.

Question: *When will staff start receiving unemployment payments?*

Answer: Funds will be available after all employees' work is certified. At this time, we believe most staff began receiving their funds the week of June 15.

Question: *We received information which indicated if we were previously enrolled in unemployment and received our payments via direct deposit, we will receive them by direct deposit now. How far back would we have had to have been enrolled?*

Answer: We believe anyone with an account in the past three years will use the debit card or direct deposit from their prior claim. Anyone without an account in the last three years should receive a new card.

UNEMPLOYMENT DEBIT CARDS

FAQ Link on Michigan UIA Debit Cards:

<https://prepaid.bankofamerica.com/MIUIADebitCard/program/faq>

Question: *When can we expect our debit card from unemployment to be mailed to us?*

Answer: Staff should have received their unemployment debit card in early June.

Question: *When we receive the debit card from Bank of America and set up the pin, will we be able to withdraw all funds on the debit card to a 0.00 balance at an ATM?*

Answer: We believe this will be an option; however, there is a fee per withdrawal when using out-of-network ATMs. In addition to Bank of America ATMs, funds can be withdrawn from Allpoint ATMs without incurring a service charge. A list of ATMs in your area can be found by visiting the [Bank of America Michigan UIA Debit Card ATM Locator](#) website. Debit card recipients can also set up fee-free transfers from the debit card account to their personal checking or savings account.

Question: *How do we check the balance on our debit cards we are provided?*

Answer: Cardholders can check the balance on their cards and review all their account transaction activity 24 hours a day online or by calling 1-866-436-1964.

- There is no fee for online and telephone balance inquiries.
- Sign up for free balance alerts (mobile text message and e-mail) by logging in to your account.
- ATM balance inquiries:
 - No fee for balance inquiries made at a Bank of America in-network ATM.
 - For inquiries made at ATMs other than Bank of America in-network ATMs, the owner of the ATM may charge a fee. Bank of America will not charge a fee.

Question: *Is there a monthly maintenance fee for the Bank of America debit cards?*

Answer: We are not aware of a monthly maintenance fee being charged to the Bank of America debit cards.

SUPPLEMENTAL EMPLOYMENT

Question: *Will engaging in supplemental employment disqualify an employee for unemployment or change the unemployment amount received?*

Answer: As stated in the FAQ document that was distributed to all staff on 5/22/20, you may work at your supplemental job for fewer hours than the number of hours you were laid off that week without being disqualified for unemployment benefits.

Examples:

Full time employee = 40 hours/week

Work Share reduction in hours = 20% or 8 hours/week

Up to 8 hours of supplemental employment worked = eligible for unemployment

8 or more hours of supplemental employment worked = NOT ELIGIBLE

Part-time employee = 20 hours/week

Work Share reduction in hours = 20% or 4 hours/week

Up to 4 hours of supplemental employment worked = eligible for unemployment

4 or more hours of supplemental employment worked = NOT ELIGIBLE

Question: *If workers have supplemental employment and cannot work at that job, will that effect unemployment?*

Answer: If you are not working any hours at your other job, it will not affect your unemployment. Below is a copy of the email sent to all MDHHS employees on 5/22/20:

As you know, MDHHS employees who have been impacted by Temporary Layoff Days over the next 10 weeks will be participating in a Work Share Program through the Unemployment Insurance Agency. This is a relatively new program and is different from what you may experience with traditional unemployment.

Thank you for your patience as information on this program was researched and compiled. Attached you will find FAQs and instructions related to the program, including helpful guidance on how to report supplemental employment to the Office of the State Employer.

Additionally, when you submit your timesheet next week in SIGMA, please use event type TLDN for hours in which you are on temporary layoff.

If you have questions, please contact your Human Resources Director Mike DeRose at DeroseM@michigan.gov

- [Work Share Program FAQs.pdf](#)
- [Workshare Program-Employee Information-Final 05-22-2020.pdf](#)
- [Work Share Supplemental Employment Form Instructions.pdf](#)

ON CALL/BACK UP WORKERS

Question: *What is going to be done about workers doing on call during the furlough period? Will working on call disqualify workers from receiving unemployment benefits?*

Answer: It is still not clear how on call may impact benefits. On call decisions need to be made at the local level based on operational need.

FIELD TEAM WORKER (FTW) QUESTIONS

Question: *There seems to be many questions regarding FTWs. Can there be a separate staff meeting to address these questions and concerns?*

Answer: Separate meetings were held with FTWs following this meeting.

Question: *Was becoming an FTW voluntary?*

Answer: FTW decisions were made at the local level. Identification of FTW teams varied by county based on need, size, and volunteer numbers.

Question: *When will the designated FTW role end?*

Answer: There is not currently a firm end date for FTWs. At this time, many people are still being affected by COVID-19; keeping a lesser footprint in the field for as long as possible is the goal. We appreciate the work of the FTWs and how they are assisting our entire CSA team.

FTW CASELOADS

Question: *Can foster care workers have their own FTW workers to complete their tasks or does this only apply to CPS?*

Answer: Requests for FTW assistance should be taken to local office leadership. Requests are reviewed on a case by case basis.

Question: *Can new FTWs be added to help lessen the load on current FTWs (allowing them to continue their layoff days and unemployment as compensation)?*

Answer: Staff are not able to be added as FTWs at this time.

Question: *Do FTWs have a smaller caseload than non-FTWs?*

Answer: Assignment of cases is determined locally based on coverage and need.

CHANGES IN FTW STATUS

Question: *If I cannot continue being an FTW, how should I proceed?*

Answer: An FTW who is no longer able to work in the FTW role should speak to their local office management.

Question: *How will face to face contacts be made if FTWs step down from that role? Can new FTWs be assigned?*

Answer: If an FTW steps down, the county is responsible for developing a plan to ensure that critical face to face contacts continue, up to and including requiring staff who have been working remotely to return to the field and complete those contacts. New FTWs cannot be assigned because of the way the FTWs and other roles across state government were identified as critical at the beginning of the Stay Home order.

Question: If an FTW stops working in that role, does their COVID hazard pay end?
Answer: FTWs who leave the FTW role are no longer eligible for COVID hazard pay.

Question: Are FTWs who leave the FTW role eligible to participate in the Work Share Program?

Answer: FTWs who leave the FTW role are not eligible to participate in the Work Share Program.

Question: Can someone who is currently in the Work Share Program become an FTW?

Answer: Staff cannot be added to the FTW teams.

FTW LEAVE USAGE QUESTIONS

Question: Are FTWs able to take annual leave?

Answer: FTWs are able to take annual leave when approved by their supervisor.

Question: Do FTWs lose the COVID hazard pay if they use annual leave and sick leave?

Answer: The COVID hazard pay is based on hours in REG status. Any other hours recorded will cause the amount to be prorated.

Field Team Worker Pay

Question: Can FTWs receive the \$600/week PUA payment instead of the \$750/pay period COVID hazard pay?

Answer: The FTWs were designated as critical staff in order to receive the COVID hazard pay of \$750/pay period. A decision was made outside of MDHHS to exempt all employees receiving the COVID hazard pay from the layoffs.

Question: Why are some FTWs only working during business hours and are therefore ineligible for on-call pay, while others are only working on-call?

Answer: FTW decisions were made locally and varied by county based on operational need, size, and volunteer numbers.

Question: Why are the FTWs receiving less in COVID hazard pay than other staff are receiving in unemployment benefits for participating in the Work Share Program?

Answer: When the COVID hazard pay was determined, the temporary layoffs and participation in the Work Share Program had not been determined or implemented. There was no way to predict that the state was going to participate in the Work Share program when department leadership was advocating for frontline staff to receive COVID hazard pay.

MISCELLANEOUS FTW QUESTIONS

Question: *Can we use our FTW volunteer experience on resumes if we apply for future jobs with the state?*

Answer: Absolutely – It is suggested.

Question: *What is MDHHS doing to prevent or reduce burnout among FTWs?*

Answer: The well-being of FTWs is important to MDHHS and increases staff's ability to be effective in their role and manage change. FTWs should speak directly with their supervisors to find ways to prevent burnout, promote work/life balance and avoid becoming overloaded and overwhelmed. External resources are also available to help staff manage stress associated with the job.

Question: *Will FTWs be exempt from future layoffs after the FTW roles end?*

Answer: Currently, there are no plans to lay-off FTWs. We do not know what future budgets will look like or if additional layoff will be needed after the FTW program ends.

MEETING DEADLINES

Question: *MDHHS Director Gordon spoke on a recent MDHHS Town Hall about recognizing that some tasks may not be completed timely due to the furloughs, and some staff are struggling to complete their work in 32 hours each week. Has or will the grace communicated by upper level MDHHS management be extended to front line supervisors and workers?*

Answer: Yes. We recognize that many are working extremely hard to deliver critical services to kids and families, especially now. We will continue to encourage prioritization of activities and the importance of compassion and grace with each other, staff, and clients.

Question: *Are we able to work in our positions more than 32 hours per week while participating in the Work Share Program if the additional work does not occur between 8 am – 5 pm on our temporary layoff day?*

Answer: No, anything above 32 hours will disqualify you from the UIA Work Share benefits.

Question: *What kind of repercussions will staff face if they cannot complete the required tasks within the 32-hour work week?*

Answer: The Work Share Program requires that the employee work the reduced number of hours designated by the employer in order to be eligible for unemployment and pandemic funds. Workers operating outside of this requirement could face potential loss of unemployment funds. If unable to complete the tasks necessary to provide critical services, please communicate with your supervisor to determine appropriate prioritization of activities.

Question: *Will caseloads be adjusted as we are only working 32 hours?*

Answer: Currently, there is no plan to reduce caseloads due to temporary layoffs.

Question: Are we going to reduce the high demands on data entry?

Answer: Employees should be completing data entry as required by policy. Concerns regarding workload should be addressed with local office management.

MOBILE WORKFORCE

Question: How long will workers be able to continue to work remotely? Will this be determined by central office or individual local offices?

Answer: Many factors will be used to determine when staff will return to their offices. Executive orders and public health guidance will help determine appropriate return to work timeframes and procedures. Central office and local offices will all have a voice in these decisions.

Question: Are staff across Michigan permitted to work at the office during the hot summer months if they do not have air conditioning at their residence?

Answer: Air conditioning is not required for staff to work from home. Local office management have determined which positions are needed in the office. At this time, only these individuals designated as such should be working in the office.

Question: What considerations are in place for staff whose children may not be returning full time to brick and mortar schools in the fall and may not have access to childcare?

Answer: This will be considered as return to work decisions are made. Supervisors are encouraged to provide flexibility as can be reasonably granted to promote healthy work life balance.

Question: When working remotely, are we able to work from our second home or another location other than our primary residence?

Answer: Some positions may require some proximity to the office, otherwise, if you are completing your work you may work from any location.

Question: Are staff statewide required to complete extra work while working from home, such as emailing their supervisors every time a social work contact is entered?

Answer: If there are concerns regarding conflicting information or inconsistent application of policy/practice guidance, please discuss the issue within your local office management. If concerns remain, escalate the issue to your BSC analyst. If concerns remain, you may contact the [CSA Town Hall mailbox](#).

RETURNING TO THE OFFICE

Question: What is the expectation for staff who are asked to return to their offices and are unable to secure childcare due to limited availability of childcare?

Answer: This will be considered as return to work decisions are made. Supervisors are encouraged to provide flexibility as can be reasonably granted to promote healthy work life balance.

Question: Gatherings in enclosed spaces pose a greater risk of contracting COVID-19. Will our offices be taking ventilation systems, seating arrangements that comply with social distancing requirements, and staffing levels into account when determining whether the office is safe for return?

Answer: We will certainly be taking CDC recommendations, including social distancing and other advisement, into consideration to limit the spread of COVID-19 when determining when and how to safely return to the office.

Question: Will workers who are more cautious about a return to in-person work, including those with compromised immune systems or other medical conditions, be allowed to continue to work from home? What about those with immediate family or household members with compromised immune systems or other medical conditions?

Answer: The ability to continue to work from home once offices reopen will be at the discretion of individual supervisors and based on operational need. Supervisors are encouraged to be as flexible as possible with staff to promote safety and healthy work life balance.

Question: When will we resume our typical job duties at our normal work locations?

Answer: We will resume normal activities in a phased approach based on the Governor's executive orders and public health guidance, which considers the status of the disease across the state and the ability to mitigate risk and keep staff and the public safe.

Question: Are workers in the office required to keep a mask on at all times? Some staff are not consistently wearing a mask while working in the office.

Answer: In compliance with the current Executive Order and for consideration of safety of employees and the citizens we serve, we ask that staff who are required to work in the office keep a mask on while there.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

Question: Are there special masks for people with respiratory health issues such as asthma?

Answer: Those with asthma or respiratory health issues may want to consider a mask that is made of material that is moisture-wicking or breathable, or they may want to experiment with options such as a bandana or neck gaiter that is open at the bottom, while still providing a protective barrier.

FACE TO FACE CONTACT

Question: *When will staff resume seeing the children and parents on their caseloads? Are staff able to volunteer to resume face to face contacts on their own caseloads?*

Answer: Counties should have plans in place to resume in-person activities by June 30. Plans should address health and safety of all individuals involved and align with public health guidance and Executive Orders.

PARENTING TIME

Question: *Is parenting time going to be supervised by FTWs or foster care workers?*

Answer: Staff assignment for supervision of parenting time is a decision that will be made at the local level.

Question: *Does resuming in-person parenting time create an additional risk to the public?*

Answer: When safely able to do so, the ability for children and parents to see each other face to face is critical to successful reunification for children in foster care. We must be cautious and adjust as conditions change, using Executive Order and public health guidance.

Question: *If parents and caregivers agree to continue video conference parenting time in lieu of face to face, will this be permissible and/or sufficient?*

Answer: Children deserve to have in person contact with their parents, family, and siblings and thus arrangements must be made to enable in person contact, including sibling visits and parenting time consistent with the court order and case plan. If extenuating circumstances exist and in person contact cannot occur in a case, a virtual visit may occur. However, an in person visit should be arranged as soon as possible.

CUSTOMER (CLIENT) SERVICES

Question: *Are foster parents allowed to take children in foster care – permanent or temporary wards – with them on out-of-state travel?*

Answer: Yes, there are currently no Executive Orders limiting out-of-state travel; however, plans to take a child in care out of state must be approved by a parent if the youth is a temporary court ward. Please see FOM 722-11 for additional requirements.

Question: *Can all staff complete drug testing for their clients, or is drug testing required to be completed by FTWs?*

Answer: Whenever possible, drug testing should be completed by Third Party Administrators (TPAs). Supervisor exceptions that allow caseworkers to collect secretions for drug testing should be limited, must be approved by a supervisor and conducted with necessary precautions in place.

MISCELLANEOUS & COMMENTS

Question: *When is the new Macomb MDHHS office scheduled to open?*

Answer: It is anticipated to open in August 2020.

Question: *Will cleaning protocols for State of Michigan offices be determined statewide or by each county? What kind of cleaning protocols can we expect to see once offices reopen?*

Answer: Cleaning protocols will be determined as part of a plan to return to the office. At this time, specifics are unknown, but protocols will align with CDC guidance.

Question: *Why are staff still being charged for our state parking spots when offices are closed and staff are required to work remotely?*

Answer: Parking tolls may involve state, local or private entities. Many lots have discontinued issuing charges for parking, however; some may not. We encourage you to call and discuss your concerns with the entity servicing your lot.