

# Memorandum



**Date** March 6, 2020

**To** All MTA Employees

**From** Patrick T. Warren, Chief Safety Officer  
Anita Miller, Chief Employee Relations and Administrative Officer  
Daria Luisi, PhD, MPH, Corporate Occupational Health Officer

**Re** Frequently Asked Questions Regarding COVID-19

This communication is intended to provide additional information to keep our employees informed. This is a rapidly changing situation and we will endeavor to keep you up to date. The health and safety of our employees, their families and our customers is our foremost concern. We hope you find the below FAQ helpful.

**1. What should I do if I've traveled to a country with a CDC advisory?**

It is essential that all employees who are returning from travel to any of the countries with CDC advisories contact Human Resources *before* returning to work. The CDC lists are updated frequently at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>.

**2. What should I do if I'm concerned about contracting COVID-19?**

There currently isn't a vaccine available, or antiviral treatment recommended for COVID-19. The best defense against COVID-19 is good hygiene. Taking simple steps can help prevent the spread of any respiratory virus, including:

- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Soap is effective at dissolving the outer layer of the COVID-19 virus, which kills it. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. It is especially important to clean hands after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your cough or sneeze.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces, including your cell phone and computer.
- Avoid handling frequently touched objects while eating hand-held foods like chips, sandwiches or pizza.

### **3. Should I get a flu vaccine?**

Medical experts encourage you to get your flu shot — and it's not too late. Although the flu shot will not protect you from COVID-19, it will help prevent the flu which has similar symptoms to this coronavirus. Occupational Health Services has expanded the hours at the seven Medical Facilities for NYCT and MTA Bus, Metro-North and Long Island Railroad to better accommodate employees' schedules. Please go to your Agency website for the new hours, which will be in effect until March 31, 2020.

### **4. Should I wear a mask to work?**

No. At this time, masks are not being recommended by the relevant medical governmental authorities. **Please be advised that this is a rapidly evolving situation and may require updates.**

### **5. I understand that masks are not recommended, but can I wear a mask if I want to?**

Current medical guidance indicates that respiratory masks do not protect healthy people – they are designed to keep infected people from spreading the virus to others. US Surgeon General Dr. Jerome Adams has warned the public that not only are facemasks not effective in preventing the general public from contracting the virus, you actually might *increase* your risk of infection if facemasks are not used properly.

In addition, it is currently understood that the virus is transmitted through droplets, not through the air. This means you cannot randomly breathe it in and that the standard surgical masks you see most people wearing will not help. Surgical-type masks are designed to keep droplets in so as to prevent the intended wearer (usually health care providers) from getting others sick, not to keep droplets out.

The US Surgeon General now warns that the panicked purchasing of facemasks is causing an additional health concern by creating a severe shortage of masks available for the purpose intended, thereby putting health care providers and their communities at even greater risk.

Facemasks are only recommended if directed by a health care provider. Since masks are not medically necessary as a protection against COVID-19, and not part of the authorized uniform, they should not be worn by employees during work hours.

### **6. Will I be allowed to wear a mask if I have asthma or some other medical condition?**

Yes. If you have an underlying medical condition which would otherwise make wearing a mask appropriate, it is permitted. If you have such a medical condition, please contact your appropriate Human Resources or Labor Relations representative about requesting an accommodation.

### **7. Can I wear my own gloves to work?**

Yes, you may wear your own gloves at work if you so choose.

**8. What should a manager/supervisor do if an employee wears a mask at work?**

If a manager/supervisor is made aware of an employee wearing a mask, they should tell the employee that masks may not be worn by employees during work hours and explain the reasons detailed above. The manager/supervisor should also reiterate the good hygiene steps that can be taken to help prevent contracting or spreading COVID-19.

**9. What are reliable sources for information pertaining to COVID-19?**

As this situation is rapidly changing, it is very important to stay informed. All employees are advised to continually consult federal, state and city agency websites for reliable information. These include the CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>), State Department of Health's (<https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus>) and the NYC Health Department (<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/providers/health-topics/novel-respiratory-viruses.page>).

**10. What should I do if I am feeling stressed or overwhelmed by the potential COVID-19 outbreak?**

Emotional reactions to stressful situations such as feeling anxious, overwhelmed or sad, or having trouble sleeping, are normal. If you are feeling distressed, please contact your Agency's employee assistance program at the following:

**NYC Transit:** (347) 643-7376

**Bridges & Tunnels:** (800) 833-8707

**LIRR:** (516) 248-3434

**Metro-North:** (212) 883-8084

**HQ:** (212) 883-8084

**Construction & Development:** (212) 883-8084

For your convenience, each Agency's Human Resources Department can be reached at:

**NYC Transit:** Jennifer Franceschini (347) 643-8466

**MTA Bus:** Marlene Masiello (718) 696-3643

**Bridges & Tunnels:** Patrick Smith (646) 252-7198

**LIRR:** Janett Ramos (347) 494-6281

**Metro-North:** Gary Martens (212) 340-2297

**HQ:** Michael A. Kalish (212) 878 1036

**Construction & Development:** Luz Pacheco (646) 252-3524