

Senate Session Guidelines

The Washington State Senate is committed to maintaining a safe working environment and reducing the likelihood for transmission of air-borne illnesses. These guidelines direct the members, staff, and workspaces of the Senate and are not intended to address the House of Representatives or Department of Enterprise Services staff or activities. This document is based on the latest guidance from the federal [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), the [Department of Health](#), [local public health authorities](#), the [Department of Labor & Industries](#), and the [Governor's office](#) and will be regularly updated. Changes will be communicated to staff and members as new guidance is provided. As guidance is constantly evolving, staff and members are encouraged to contact the Human Resource Officer (HRO) or the Secretary's Office if they have questions or concerns.

The goal of these guidelines is to provide for a legislative session that balances the following priorities:

- 1) **A session that is safe.** Of paramount importance to Senate Administration and Leadership is the safety of Senate staff, the public, and the legislators charged with conducting the people's work.
- 2) **A session that is transparent.** This legislative session will look unlike any other. But each necessary change taken to preserve the safety of Senate staff and legislators has been carefully balanced with the need for transparency to the public that holds its elected officials accountable.
- 3) **A session that not only preserves, but enhances, public participation.** Increased efforts have been taken wherever possible to make the legislative process more open and accessible to those who may not have traditionally been able to participate in pre-COVID times. As a result, lessons learned will be taken beyond this pandemic to create additional transparency and increase public participation across our state.
- 4) **A session that functions efficiently.** Our state Constitution charges the Senate with conducting the people's work within 105 days. To accomplish this during these unprecedented times will take great flexibility, nimbleness, and efficiency.

1. Overarching Public Health Principles

Any person authorized to work on-site during the legislative session will be required to wear a mask in all legislative facilities unless alone in their office. This includes hallways, bathrooms, and outdoor locations where social distancing of at least 6 feet is difficult to maintain. Masks will be provided by the Senate in accordance with guidance from the Department of Labor and Industries.

At least six feet of social distancing must be maintained at all times. Staff and members are advised not to congregate in public spaces when walking throughout legislative facilities.

2. Who is authorized to work on-site during session?

Legislative facilities will be open to authorized employees and legislators only. Legislative facilities will remain closed to the public and guests. Each building entrance will have information to assist members of the public who arrive on campus with remotely contacting their legislators.

Senate Committee Services may allow staff to work on-site on a limited basis to manage committee hearings and complete certain tasks related to budget development and bill and amendment drafting. The Secretary's office will identify necessary staff to manage the rostrum and provide security. During floor sessions, each caucus may designate up to two staff members necessary to aide in the functions of the floor who may work in the Senate wings.

Senate employees are encouraged to continue teleworking as much as possible. Those staff who were approved to return to work on campus during Phase 3 are not automatically permitted to continue during session. Staff directors will submit a general session staffing plan for approval by the Secretary. In creating a staffing plan, staff directors should keep in mind how many employees are physically present on campus each day to ensure that social distancing can be maintained throughout the buildings.

While legislative assistants are encouraged to telework whenever possible, legislators and legislative assistants may work with the Human Resource Officer to arrive at an in-person session staffing model that preserves safety and function. Session aides and interns will work remotely.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have identified [certain people who are at an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19](#). If an employee or member is at increased risk for severe illness and in need of an accommodation they should contact the HRO.

3. How will floor action work?

Swearing-in of Members

Members will be sworn in on an individual basis by a judge to be arranged by the Senate before convening on the floor. The swearing-in ceremonies will be broadcast on TVW and livestreamed on a Senate internet broadcast network.

First Day of Session

The first day of the legislative session will require an in-person quorum of at least 25 members to vote on changes to Senate Rules. Those who wish to be physically present for this vote will vote in shifts in a manner that will provide for adequate social distancing and reduce the risk of congregating, to be determined by the Facilities and Operations Committee.

Regular Floor Action

Floor action will be conducted in a hybrid format, with some members participating in-person on the Senate floor and some members participating remotely. The F&O Committee will make a decision shortly before session on how many members and staff will be allowed on the floor, rostrum, and in the wings based on DOH guidance and the current COVID-19 infection rate. The F&O Committee may adjust the allowable number of members and staff during session if necessary.

For planning purposes, the expectation will be based on current guidance from DOH and the Olympia Fire Department. DOH Safe Start Guidelines limit indoor capacity to 30% capacity (per fire marshal code) or 200 people, whichever is less. The Olympia Fire Marshal has advised that the Senate Floor Capacity is 70 people and, in considering the extra space afforded by the Senate wings, has recommended a capacity limit of 21-30 individuals inclusive of members and staff.

Members participating remotely will use a secure voting system devised by LegTech. Members participating remotely must be seen through a video link provided by LegTech in order to vote or to be recognized to speak. Phone calls will not suffice.

Members who are participating remotely may do so from their homes (with a reliable internet connection) or from their legislative office in Olympia. Members are responsible for their own technical and network reliability issues if using a remote location other than their Senate office. Senate dress code will be enforced while participating remotely.

Caucuses will select the members and staff who will be physically present on the Senate Floor and wings and provide that list to the Secretary of the Senate and the Floor Leader at the beginning of each day. The list may change from day to day but may not change throughout the day due to necessary cleaning and disinfecting measures that must be taken.

Members permitted to vote from the Senate floor must remain socially distanced at their desks. Arrows will be placed on the Senate floor to direct foot traffic and help maintain social distance throughout the day. Masks will be provided by the Senate and must be worn in accordance with guidance from the Department of Labor and Industries.

The President of the Senate, together with the Senate Floor Leaders, will enforce mask and social distance rules and may call upon the Sergeant at Arms when necessary.

Caucus Meetings

Full caucus meetings will be conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams on the Senate's Intranet. Smaller, in-person meetings of members and/or staff should not occur if such meetings can be held virtually. Where in-person meetings are unavoidable, masks must be worn and social distancing of at least six feet between participants must be maintained.

4. How will committee action work?

Washington State benefits from extraordinary public participation in the legislative process. Year after year, thousands of people visit the Capitol from all over the state to make their voices heard. Regrettably, the 2021 legislative session must operate differently for the health of the public, staff, and legislators.

Committee meetings will be held remotely via Zoom given the public health risk of people congregating at the Capitol from different parts of the state. However, this will provide historically broadened access to committee hearings for members of the public wishing to testify before legislative committees.

Traditionally, members of the public have had to travel to the Capitol to testify. The 2021 legislative session will provide members of the public with the opportunity to sign in and testify directly from their homes, places of business, or wherever is most convenient for them.

Using the electronic sign-in process already utilized by legislative committees, the public will be able to sign-in up to one hour in advance of a scheduled committee meeting to receive a unique Zoom link. Chairs will then decide the order and length of public testimony as would be the case with an in-person committee meeting.

Additional procedures for committees to increase transparency and ensure public participation will be adopted via both Senate Resolution and Senate Committee Services guidelines.

5. Will the public have access to legislative buildings?

As noted, allowing members of the public to access legislative buildings carries a risk of infection not only within the legislative community, but also within the communities to which constituents would be returning. Regrettably, legislative buildings must be closed to lobbyists and the public.

Meetings with constituents and legislators will be held remotely. Each building entrance will have information to help members of the public contact their legislators (phone numbers, e-mails, etc.).

The Senate will livestream all floor and committee action to a Senate YouTube channel. TVW will also broadcast all floor and committee action via their cable and web streaming platforms.

Credentialed members of the Capitol Press Corps will be permitted to observe floor action from the Senate gallery. No more than six members of the press may be present in the gallery at a time. Masks must be worn upon entering the Legislative Building and six feet of distance must be maintained at all times. Press must sign in and out of the gallery upon entry and will be screened for COVID symptoms.

6. How will the physical space of the Senate be prepared?

The Secretary will coordinate with the Department of Enterprise Services (DES) and Legislative Support Services (LSS) to make arrangements for the following:

- Identify problem areas for physical distancing.
- Ensure availability and proper placement of sanitizing materials (e.g. wipes and hand sanitizer), protective equipment, tissues, and wastebaskets.
- Remove or block seating to allow for distancing in communal areas (e.g. conference, break rooms, wings).
- Provide signage to reinforce safe practices.
- Post printer and copier usage and cleaning instructions and ensure that sanitizing supplies are provided.

- Post instructions for elevator use, including limiting the number of users, marked waiting area, and cleaning for touch points.
- Mark areas such as tight stairways or hallways to only allow for “one-way passage” to limit face to face interactions.
- Ensure that ventilation and filtration systems are updated consistent with CDC guidelines.
- Make improvements to the engineering controls using the building’s ventilation system.
- Support respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene. This includes, for example, making tissues available, providing soap and water, placing hand sanitizers in multiple locations, and displaying posters to remind individuals to wash their hands and refrain from touching their faces or masks.
- Perform routine environmental cleaning and disinfection, particularly of surfaces that are frequently touched.

7. What training and resources will staff and members receive prior to the start of session?

Prior to the start of session, members and staff will be required to participate in a “Return to Work Orientation” with the Senate HRO. These will be conducted over Teams via Senate intranet on a regular basis. (See [General Requirements and Prevention Ideas for Workplaces](#)) The HRO will make information available to staff and members regarding work accommodations. All of the reference materials will be posted on the [Senate intranet](#).

The Secretary's Office will also regularly disseminate the latest data from DOH regarding COVID-19 infection rates around the state.

8. What screening procedures will be in place for members and authorized staff who are working on-site in legislative facilities?

Employees and members will be screened each day before entering any legislative buildings. They will be asked a series of questions (see below) and their temperatures will be taken. If they answer “yes” to any of the questions below, they will not be permitted access. The HRO will contact them with guidance and next steps. The Senate encourages staff and members to review these questions prior to leaving home in the morning and to generally monitor their health.

1. Do you have any of these symptoms that are not caused by another condition?
 - Fever or chills
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - Fatigue
 - Muscle or body aches
 - Persistent headache
 - Recent loss of taste or smell
 - Sore throat

- Congestion
 - Nausea or vomiting
 - Diarrhea
2. Within the past 14 days, have you had contact with anyone that you know had COVID-19 or COVID-like symptoms? Contact is being 6 feet or closer for more than 15 minutes in a 24-hour period with a person, or having direct contact with fluids from a person with COVID-19 (for example, being coughed or sneezed on).
 3. Have you had a positive COVID-19 test for active virus in the past 10 days?
 4. Within the past 14 days, has a public health or medical professional told you to self-monitor, self-isolate, or self-quarantine because of concerns about COVID-19 infection?

9. What is expected of staff and members when they are working on-site?

Legislative facility operations will be very different. Changes are necessary to keep staff and members safe and prevent the spread of air-borne illnesses, but many of these changes may feel inconvenient and unfamiliar. Staff and members will be asked to join in efforts to keep each other safer by reducing the likelihood for transmission of Coronavirus and other air-borne illnesses. (See [How to Protect Yourself and Others](#)) These changes include the following:

- Employees and members must maintain at least 6 feet of distance at all times. They must immediately disperse if a situation arises that makes adequate distancing impossible.
- Unless impossible to do so, all meetings should occur virtually.
- Consistent with the Secretary of Health's Directive and [Washington state order](#), staff and members must wear face coverings over their noses and mouths, except when they are alone in their office with a door closed. If an employee's workspace is not a private office with a closing door, they will be required to wear a face covering. The Senate will provide masks. Members and staff should refrain from touching their face or masks during the day. (See [How to Wear Face Coverings](#) and [How to Wash Face Coverings](#))
- Staff must wash their hands or use hand sanitizer immediately upon entry in legislative facilities. (See [How to Wash Your Hands](#))
- Throughout the workday, staff should regularly wash their hands, refrain from touching their face or masks, and practice good hygiene habits. (See [Coughing and Sneezing Etiquette](#))

- Employees must sign in and out with Security when entering or exiting a legislative building. When signing out, employees must identify where they were in the building. Signing out can be done by phone or email as well - x7572 or SenSecurity@leg.wa.gov.
- Most communal rooms, such as work-out rooms will be closed. Other areas, such as copy rooms will be open, but staff and members should respect distancing requirements and guidance in posted signs in these spaces.
- Capacity for elevators will be limited to one person at a time. Those with disabilities or other physical limitations have priority in elevator use.
- Chairs and seating in communal areas will be removed. Most kitchen equipment and water fountains will be unavailable for use.
- Water and coffee services will be paused.
- Food sharing, communal meals, and food in common areas where people congregate are not permitted.
- In order to request office supplies, staff should email LSS Supply and make an appointment.

10. What if a member or employee tests positive for COVID-19, experiences COVID-19 like symptoms, or is exposed to someone with COVID-19?

- The Senate will work with local public health authorities and follow DOH guidelines to reduce the risk of transmission in the workplace. Additionally, the Senate will notify staff and members who may have been exposed to COVID-19 in the workplace and notify them of next steps, including information on testing and when they may return to legislative facilities.
- The Senate will work with local public health authorities in identifying close contacts for purposes of contact tracing. A close contact is defined by the CDC as someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period starting from 2 days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic persons, 2 days prior to positive specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated.
- **Positive COVID-19 Diagnosis.** If staff or members have been working in legislative facilities and receive a positive diagnosis of COVID-19, they should not return to work and immediately notify the HRO. The employee or member should isolate at home according to DOH's guidance. Unless directed otherwise by a medical provider, a member or employee with confirmed COVID-19 with symptoms should isolate until they have been fever-free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication, the symptoms have gotten better, and least 10 days have passed since the symptoms first appeared. If a member or employee tests positive for COVID-19, but does not have any symptoms, they should isolate at home until least 10 days have gone by since the date of the first positive COVID-19 test and the person has not gotten sick with COVID-19.

- **COVID-19 like symptoms without known exposure.** If an employee or member develops COVID-19 like symptoms while working in a legislative building they must immediately leave the building and notify the HRO. Likewise, if an employee or member develops COVID-19 like symptoms and has been in a legislative facility, they should not return to work and should notify the HRO. The employee or member should also contact their healthcare provider for further instruction. They should not return to work until cleared by their healthcare provider.
- **Exposure to someone with COVID-19 or COVID-19-like symptoms.** If a member or employee is a close contact to someone they know had COVID-19 or COVID-like symptoms, they should not return to legislative facilities for at least 14 days and seek further direction from their medical provider. They must also report this to the HRO. Again, a close contact is defined by the CDC as someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period starting from 2 days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic persons, 2 days prior to positive specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated.
- The identity of those reporting any of this information to the HRO will remain confidential. If the HRO is required to share any information with public health authorities, they will notify the employee or member before doing so.
- In a situation where a person with COVID-19 or COVID-19-like symptoms has been in legislative facilities, DES will clean and disinfect the area to minimize the potential of other employees being exposed to respiratory droplets. They will wait 24 hours before beginning the disinfecting process, but if 24 hours is not feasible, they will wait as long as possible. During this waiting period, the Senate will open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in these areas.

11. Testing

Testing will be required in the following circumstances:

- Someone has COVID-19 like symptoms. In this case, the test results would be used to determine how long until a person may return to legislative facilities.
- Someone was in close contact with a person with COVID-19 or COVID-19 like symptoms. In this case, that individual would need to get tested AND stay away for a minimum of 14 days (the length of time it can take for symptoms to appear).

The Senate will work with a dedicated provider near the Capitol Campus that can provide testing to members and staff without the need for an appointment/doctor's referral upon onset of symptoms.