

2023 Senate Session Guidelines

The Washington State Senate is committed to maintaining a safe working environment and reducing the likelihood for transmission of COVID-19. 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](#), and the [Department of Labor & Industries](#) 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.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the goal of Senate Administration and Leadership in creating 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 plan continues to reflect changes made in response to COVID-19. 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 will take great flexibility, nimbleness, and efficiency.

1. Will members and staff be required to work onsite during session?

Members will attend committee and floor sessions in person. Virtual meeting options will continue to be available for other types of meetings.

Staff will resume in-person work during the 2023 legislative session. Members have the discretion to allow remote work for their legislative assistant and session aide on a limited basis as feasible for office operations. Staff directors have the discretion to allow remote work on a limited basis. Senate Interns and Senate Pages will be in person.

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

3. How will floor action work?

Floor action will revert to in person as it was prior to the 2021 session, in person floor action and voice voting will resume.

- Up to 6 Members (3 members from each caucus) may be permitted to vote remotely due to illness or emergency.
 - Members must receive approval from the Caucus Leader to vote remotely at least two hours prior to floor session. Notice will be given by Caucus Leaders to the Secretary of the Senate.
 - Members participating remotely will be permitted to vote and speak. They will not be permitted to make motions, move amendments, make points of order, etc.
 - To be recognized to speak, a remote member must notify the Assistant Floor Leader of their caucus or other designee. The Assistant Floor Leader or designee will rise to be recognized by the Lieutenant Governor and notify the Lieutenant Governor that the remote member wishes to be recognized to speak.
- In accordance with Senate Rules, members unable to be present for floor action for reasons unrelated to an illness or emergency may be excused.
- Caucus meeting format will be at the discretion of the Caucus chair.

The Senate wings are limited to members, staff and other guests as approved by the Secretary of the Senate. Masking is strongly encouraged in the wings due to the lack of ventilation.

Members of the press may return to normal practices.

The use of Security to distribute notes to the members from the public and lobbyists remains discouraged. Each caucus will provide to security a list of members that accept notes on the floor and Security will distribute notes to those members. Visitors and lobbyist should contact the legislative office of those that do not accept notes.

In the event of a change in public health guidance, significant legislative COVID outbreak or other emergency, the facilities and operations committee may decide to transition to hybrid floor operations similar to 2022.

4. How will committee action work?

Committee meetings will generally be expected to be in-person with some exceptions. At the start of session each committee chair will determine if remote participation will be available for committee members. If the Committee Chair decides to switch the format, they will provide notice to all members of the Committee and SCS Committee staff. Notice will be provided at least 24 hours in advance of the first hearing that will have a new format.

Utilizing new hearing room technology that has integrated Zoom features into the hearing room AV system, the Committees can receive testimony from the public both in person, and remotely. The public will have the opportunity to sign in to testify on-line using the same web-portal that has been used over the past two sessions, as well as, in person as at kiosks located on the Capital Campus.

Similar to the 2023 session, the public will be able to sign-in up to one hour in advance of a scheduled committee meeting and can designate whether they will testify in person or remotely. This deadline applies to both on-line and in person sign-ups. All persons signing in, regardless of whether they indicate an intent to testify in person or remotely, will receive a unique Zoom link in case their plans change. Committee Chairs will then decide the order and length of public testimony.

With the new hearing room technology, Committee Chairs now will also have the option to allow presentations from remote presenters for Work Sessions.

Remote bill presentations in a public hearing by Committee Staff is allowed for health-related reasons, on a case-by-case basis.

In the event that the Senate reverts to hybrid floor action, committee will revert to hybrid operations. Detailed Committee Operations are outlined in the 2023 Session Committee Hearing Operations document.

5. Will the public have access to legislative buildings?

Legislative buildings and the Senate Galleries will be open to the public. Any capacity restrictions will be posted and enforced by Senate Security. Members may hold individual meetings virtually or in-person.

6. How will COVID-19 safety protocols be enforced?

Senate Security will be responsible for enforcing Senate COVID-19 safety protocols. Any person who refuses to follow safety protocols will be escorted from Senate facilities by Senate Security. Staff and members should contact Senate Security if any problems arise.

Individual member offices may impose more stringent COVID-19 protocols.

7. 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:

- Ensure that ventilation and filtration systems are updated consistent with CDC guidelines.
- Make improvements to the engineering controls using the building's ventilation system.
- Place high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters in common areas and areas where legislators or staff gather such as caucus rooms and hearing rooms.
- Ensure availability and proper placement of CDC recommended masks, at-home COVID-19 antigen tests, sanitizing materials, tissues, and wastebaskets.
- Provide signage to reinforce safe practices.

- Perform routine environmental cleaning and disinfection, particularly of surfaces that are frequently touched.

8. What happens if a member or staff is experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19?

If you are in your legislative office and test positive, or if you have recently been in your legislative office, you must notify HR at 360-786-7625 or senate.HRO@leg.wa.gov. When HR is notified, they will contact those people that have had close contact and will remind them of these protocols. The following symptoms are associated with COVID-19:

- | | |
|--|--|
| • Fever (subjective or greater than or equal to 100.4°F) | • Headache |
| • Chills | • Muscle or body aches |
| • Cough | • Sore throat |
| • Loss of sense of taste and/or smell | • Congestion or runny nose |
| • Shortness of breath | • Nausea or vomiting |
| • Fatigue | • Diarrhea (at least 2 loose stools in 24 hours) |

Testing and Isolation Requirements when a member or staff is experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19:

- If a member or staff is experiencing one or more symptoms associated with COVID-19, they must be tested for COVID-19 and may not return to legislative facilities until they receive a negative test or have completed the CDC recommended isolation protocol.

9. What if a member or staff tests positive for COVID-19?

If staff and members receive positive test results for COVID-19, they should follow [CDC precautions](#). If you are in your legislative office and test positive, or if you have recently been in your legislative office, you must notify HR at 360-786-7625 or senate.HRO@leg.wa.gov. When HR is notified, they will contact those people that have had close contact and will remind them of these protocols.

- **Requirements if Asymptomatic:** An asymptomatic person who has tested positive for COVID-19 **may not enter Senate facilities for five full days from the date they tested positive**. The day they test positive is considered day “0”. If an asymptomatic person does develop symptoms following the initial test, the day they first develop symptoms is considered day “0”.

After day five, an asymptomatic person may end isolation.

- **Requirements if Symptomatic:** If a person has tested positive for COVID-19 and develops symptoms, they **may not enter Senate facilities for five full days from the date they developed symptoms**. The day they first develop symptoms is considered day “0”. They must also be fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medication) and their symptoms must be improving.

After day five, a symptomatic person whose symptoms are improving may end isolation if they are fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication.

After day five, a symptomatic person who continues to experience symptoms, who had moderate to severe symptoms, or who has a weakened immune system should isolate through day 10.

Anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19 should wear a CDC recommended mask through day 10 even if they have ended isolation and their symptoms have subsided.

Detailed information on isolation and precautions can be found in these [CDC Guidelines](#).

11. What if a member or staff is exposed to someone with confirmed COVID-19?

Being identified as close contact to COVID-19 means that someone has been within 6 feet of a person with a confirmed COVID-19 infection for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period. **Anyone who has been exposed to COVID-19 should wear a well-fitting mask for 10 days and get tested on day 5.** See [CDC isolation and quarantine guidelines](#).

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

Staff and members will be asked to join in efforts to keep each other safer by reducing the likelihood for transmission of COVID-19 and other air-borne illnesses. (See [How to Protect Yourself and Others](#)) These changes include the following:

- Members and staff should maintain distance as much as possible.
- Members and staff are encouraged to wear KN95 masks or other DOH approved face coverings over their noses and mouths. The Senate will provide masks. (See [How to Wear Face Coverings](#) and [How to Wash Face Coverings](#))
- Members and staff are encouraged to complete at-home antigen tests regularly throughout the week. The Senate will provide tests.
- Throughout the workday, members and staff should regularly wash their hands, refrain from touching their face or masks, and practice good hygiene habits. (See [Coughing and Sneezing Etiquette](#))
- Communal rooms will have posted capacity limitations and/ or safety protocols.
- Individual member offices may impose more stringent COVID-19 protocols. All members, staff, and visitors should respect individual office protocols.