

Policies regarding Requests for Work/School/Mask Exemptions

Our office has received numerous requests for letters or forms to be completed in regards to requirements for mask wearing, attending school or attending work during the current COVID19 pandemic. Most of these requests fall into 1 of 2 broad categories: 1) a request to be exempt from wearing masks and 2) requests to work from home to avoid potential exposure to COVID19 virus. In order to facilitate timely handling of these request, the following policies will be applied to these requests.

- 1) Request for exemption from wearing a mask at work/school. Generally speaking, there is **no medical reason why someone cannot wear a mask**. Even if the patient has allergies, asthma or some other respiratory problems, this does not mean that they cannot wear a mask. Currently, masks are required in all indoor buildings in Leon County. This requirement is being implemented by the city and county commissions and it is a legal requirement, not a medical requirement. Almost universally, people find masks to be somewhat irritating or annoying and it seems unlikely that anyone would choose to wear a mask unless absolutely necessary. However, masks are currently required and there are a wide variety of styles and materials available. If you find your mask uncomfortable, irritating or otherwise bothersome, you will need to try different masks until you find one that is more tolerable.
- 2) Requests to work from home. Research has shown that patients with stable asthma who are taking medication daily to control their symptoms are not at any increased risk for infection with or serious complications from COVID19. Patients with stable asthma can attend work or school and should continue to take the regular controller medications and follow all social distancing guidelines in place at their school or work site.

Patients who are over the age of 65 are at an increased risk for adverse outcome from COVID19 and we would recommend that they work from home if at all possible. Patients who have a diagnosed primary immunodeficiency of any age also should work from home or attend virtual school. We will provide letters in these instances if needed, although most employers and schools will probably grant this request even without a letter.

We have also received requests from patients asking for letters authorizing them to work at home in order to avoid possible exposure to coronavirus out of concerned that they will become sick or that they will possibly transmit the virus to a family member. The Department of Labor and Congress passed the Family's First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) earlier this year. This act provides that covered employers must provide to all employees up to 80 hours of paid sick leave if the employee is unable to work because they are quarantined with a diagnosis of COVID19 infection. Covered employers may also be required to pay up to 80 hours of sick leave at two thirds of the employee's regular rate of pay if the employee is unable to work because of a bona fide need to care for an individual subject to quarantine or care for a child under 18 if his/her school or child care provider is closed or unavailable for reasons related to COVID19. There are a number of requirements that have to be met in order to qualify for this leave

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but essentially, it can only be used in a case where an employee or their direct family member is diagnosed with COVID19 and subject to a quarantine. There is no provision in the law to allow patients to use this leave time so that they can avoid potential exposure. In almost every case, there would not be a medical reason that would compel a patient to work from home in order to avoid a potential infection unless they are immunocompromised. If you are concerned about potential for exposure, I would recommend that you talk with her employer to discuss their prevention protocols as well as any options they might have to work remotely. Most businesses have been forced to adopt numerous safeguards to reduce the risk for exposure. This will usually be a decision that needs to be discussed and reached between you and your employer.

If, after reading and considering the above policies, you still feel that your request does not fall within the parameters listed above, you may request a review of yours or your family members symptoms, history, management and recommendations during the COVID19 pandemic. These requests will be considered on an individual basis. Please be aware that this might require an office visit to fully evaluate your request.

Sincerely,

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