

COVID-19 page on the NALC website: A depository of information

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have far-reaching consequences for letter carriers and the Postal Service. With new information coming quickly and changing rapidly, NALC has created the “COVID-19” page under “News & Research” at nalc.org. The page contains:

- Statements by NALC President Fredric Rolando
- Links to NALC’s “You Are the Current Resident” podcast in which Executive Vice President Brian Renfro delivers regular updates on COVID-19
- New memorandums of understanding in effect during the pandemic
- All of the mandatory stand-up talks that should be given in every office
- Information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- COVID-19 information from USPS
- Link to the COVID19@nalc.org email address

The NALC website allows the union to disseminate information quickly. NALC constantly updates the COVID-19 page to ensure that letter carriers have easy access to immediate information as they work and live in the midst of the pandemic.

Keep communicating any issues to your NALC representatives

The national officers, staff and NALC representatives throughout the country are in constant communication and negotiation with management officials at every level of the organization regarding supplies, equipment, policies, protocols and work procedures necessary to keep letter carriers safe. Please continue communicating with them regarding any questions or issues that you may have in your office. Letter carriers should always let their union representatives know when:

- Their offices are not being sanitized on a regular basis.
- They do not have sufficient supplies (hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, masks, gloves, etc.).
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) protocols for employees to be quarantined are not being followed.
- Proper social distancing practices have not been implemented in their office.
- Stand-up talks are not being conducted.
- Proper safety precautions are not being followed.
- Employees are expected to work without protection or in an unsanitary environment.
- There are any other issues that put employees at increased risk of being exposed to COVID-19.

If you have questions or issues in your facility related to COVID-19 and you don’t have immediate access to a steward or branch officer, or are unable to contact your NBA office, please contact NALC Headquarters at COVID19@nalc.org. Headquarters staff and national officers answer every question sent to this email address. When using this resource, please be sure to include your name and NALC branch number in your email. Having this information upfront allows NALC Headquarters to quickly address your concerns.

Two additional types of leave spark many questions

NALC has received many questions through COVID19@nalc.org regarding the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), which became effective on April 1. The Act provides employees with two additional types of leave. First, employees with a qualifying circumstance as defined by the Act are eligible for up to 80 hours of Emergency Paid Sick Leave, in addition to their normal sick leave balances. Second, employees who have a child whose school or place of care is closed may be eligible for leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), the majority of which is additional paid leave. These provisions apply from April 1, 2020, through Dec. 31, 2020, and are in addition to any personal annual and/or sick leave balances that carriers have.

An employee is entitled to use Emergency Paid Sick Leave for absences related to COVID-19 if the employee is unable to work, including unable to telework, because the employee:

1. Is subject to a federal, state or local quarantine, or isolation order related to COVID-19.
2. Has been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine related to COVID-19.
3. Is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and is seeking a medical diagnosis.
4. Is caring for an individual subject to a federal, state or local quarantine, or self-quarantine.
5. Is caring for their child whose school or place of care is closed or the childcare provider is unavailable due to COVID-19-related reasons.
6. Is experiencing any other substantially similar conditions specified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

In regard to qualifying reason 1, in many cities and states, government authorities have issued a quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19. Some local and state governments have also identified groups of people who should self-quarantine, such as individuals over a certain age. While the Postal Service is considered mission critical and not subject to state and local directives, employees who choose to self-quarantine in these circumstances may be eligible to use the 80 hours of Emergency Paid Sick Leave to cover their absence. Prior to passage of the Act, the Postal Service liberally granted personal leave for this purpose, and now states that “We will continue to handle application of this qualifying factor as we had prior to the passage of the FFCRA and liberally grant Emergency Paid Sick Leave to employees who believe they have an individual circumstance for which taking this leave is appropriate.”

In President Rolando’s April 3 statement found on the COVID-19 page on the NALC website, he discusses in great detail the benefits of Emergency Paid Sick Leave, as well as the Emergency Family and Medical Leave Expansion, for employees who have a child whose school or place of care is closed. He also explains what steps should be taken and what type of leave should be afforded to employees who have had certain forms of exposure (or potential exposure) to COVID-19. Please refer to that statement for an in-depth explanation of these subjects.

Updated USPS policy regarding face coverings and masks

Recently, the Postal Service released a mandatory stand-up talk regarding the wearing of face coverings and masks while employees are at work. As a result of many state or local authorities mandating that face coverings are now required in public settings, USPS has modified its policy to require that all employees wear face coverings in the following situations, until the COVID-19 pandemic is no longer an issue:

- When there is a local or state face-covering order or directive in place; or
- When an employee who does not deal directly with the public cannot achieve or maintain social distancing in the workplace.

Cloth face coverings or masks are mandatory consistent with local or state face-covering directives or orders. In addition, face coverings and masks are mandatory for employees who do not deal directly with the public in all facilities where social distancing cannot be maintained.

Employees may request a face covering or surgical mask from their supervisor. They may also bring their own personal cloth face coverings to work for use while on duty. Any employee who cannot wear a face covering for health reasons should immediately contact their supervisor.

Mandatory stand-up talk to be given when a co-worker tests positive for COVID-19

Last month, the Postal Service developed and distributed a mandatory stand-up talk that must be given in every facility when an employee in that facility has tested positive for COVID-19. The purpose of the stand-up talk is to make other employees aware that one of their co-workers tested positive for the virus. Under the Rehabilitation Act and the Privacy Act, specific employee medical information must be kept confidential and may only be shared in very limited circumstances. Therefore, the Postal Service cannot share the name of the employee who tested positive for COVID-19 or their medical condition.

Consistent with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the infected employee cannot return to work until cleared. The Postal Service should reach out to the local public health office for guidance, including protocols for contact tracing of other employees who may need to be quarantined. Additionally, once it has been determined that an employee tested positive for the coronavirus, the facility in which they work must be thoroughly cleaned in accordance with CDC guidelines specific to COVID-19.

Workers’ compensation for letter carriers who contract coronavirus at work

Letter carriers who develop COVID-19 while in the performance of their duties are entitled to workers’ compensation coverage pursuant to the Federal Employees’ Compensation Act (FECA). Exposure to COVID-19 alone does not constitute a work-related injury entitling an employee to medical treatment under the FECA. The employee must actually be diagnosed with COVID-19 to potentially be afforded coverage.

However, in addition to letter carriers who have tested positive for COVID-19, letter carriers who have been working and are symptomatic for COVID-19 but have no history of exposure outside of work should register and then file a CA-1 claim in the Department of Labor’s Employees’ Compensation Operations & Management Portal (ECOMP). Carriers should also contact their installation and request a CA-16, Authorization for Examination and/or Treatment, which will pay for the first 60 days of medical bills. Letter carriers who are asymptomatic do not need to file a claim.

Given how quickly the coronavirus can develop, the Office of Workers’ Compensation Programs (OWCP) recommends registering in ECOMP as a good pre-emptive move for all letter carriers. Employees can register in ECOMP without filing a claim at ecomp.dol.gov. Instructions on how to register in ECOMP can be found on the NALC website at the “Injured on the Job” tab under “Workplace Issues.”

OWCP will pay for the COVID-19 test upfront (prior to accepting a claim) only if a claimant was exposed to a person with a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19 in the performance of duty. Otherwise, OWCP will pay for the test, if the claim is accepted, through reimbursement.

If you have any questions or need assistance with a claim, please contact your NBA office as soon as possible. NALC has full-time regional workers’ compensation assistants ready to assist members with OWCP claims related to COVID-19.

USPS launches COVID-19 command center for assistance with cleaning supplies and protective equipment

The Postal Service has established a COVID-19 Supplies Command Center to support USPS facilities with ordering and tracking necessary supplies to keep employees safe and facilities clean during the coronavirus pandemic. In addition to facilities continuing to order supplies following standard procedures and using local buying where available, the command center is working closely with supply management and district supply coordinators to centrally fulfill orders for masks, gloves, air and hand sanitizers, cleaning products and other items directly from the USPS Material Distribution Center in Topeka, KS.

Facilities and employees can contact the center for help tracking orders and for when they need assistance in locating and ordering supplies. Additionally, the center will monitor field inventories daily to assist districts in identifying facilities that are low on items needed to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

Employees can call the COVID-19 Supplies Command Center at 844-773-3594, Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Eastern Time.

Keeping the U.S. Postal Service afloat through the financial effects of COVID-19

In addition to our priority commitment to protecting the safety and health of letter carriers, NALC is working to ensure that the Postal Service has the resources necessary to continue operations. We remain very involved with our congressional representatives with regard to proposed provisions for stimulus packages related to the COVID-19 virus. As plans for the next stimulus package are being developed, we are again pursuing appropriations to maintain the Postal Service’s revenue stream through the crisis. The Postal Service is projecting the impact on its revenues related to the pandemic and the shutdown of the U.S. economy to be both devastating and immediate. Although package volumes are up as we deliver goods for families forced to stay home by the crisis, other mail volume has declined. By the end of the year, the Postal Service expects total volume to fall by more than 50 percent, greatly affecting its \$70 billion in annual revenues.

“Congress must step in to provide financial appropriations to the Postal Service, the way it did in March for private companies damaged by the pandemic-induced recession with a \$2.2 trillion relief package that did not include any appropriations to the Postal Service,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said in a statement. “Although the Postal Service has not needed taxpayer support for nearly 40 years, it needs it now.”

NALC took the lead in drafting a white paper on how to provide financial relief to the Postal Service from the pandemic; it is posted on our website in the “Government Affairs” section under “News & Updates.” In it, NALC lays out the necessary provisions that must be included in the next stimulus bill. These provisions include:

1. Making a direct “public service” appropriation of at least \$25 billion to the Postal Service to help it weather the pandemic and the deep recession it is causing. Although the Postal Service has not received taxpayer appropriations (other than for military/overseas voting and free mail for the blind) since the early 1980s, the present crisis warrants such appropriations now.
2. Authorizing an emergency “public service” appropriation for the duration of the crisis, distributed quarterly, starting in Fiscal Year 2021 (which begins in just six months) to cover the difference between postage revenues and total USPS expenses. This would signal to the American people and the business community that the Postal Service will be there to battle the pandemic (with the delivery of tests and public health information, etc.); deliver online purchases and prescription drugs; support the economic recovery; and facilitate absentee voting as well as other vital civic functions.
3. Providing a mechanism to reimburse the Postal Service for the cost of the COVID-19-related leave (both sick leave and family medical leave) provided by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act.
4. Ensuring equal treatment for postal employees in any legislation that authorizes and funds hazard pay for front-line workers exposed to health risks related to the COVID-19 virus. Such legislation should cover postal workers, who face heightened exposure risks to the virus on a daily basis.
5. Removing the Federal Finance Bank’s discretion to impose operational changes and policy conditions on any of the Postal Service’s existing borrowing authorities—changes and policies that should properly be set by the Postal Service Board of Governors and Congress, not the Treasury Department—and eliminate any annual limit on these authorities.

NALC is building a lobbying plan and a grassroots campaign to advance these legislative goals. A recent bipartisan poll, spanning all socioeconomic demographics and political affiliations, shows that the American public overwhelmingly supports Congress appropriating funds for the Postal Service to maintain operations through the coronavirus crisis in the next round of financial relief legislation.

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