

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT LEAVES & REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, many CTA members have questions about their workplace rights regarding medical leave, family leave, reasonable accommodations for disabilities, underlying health conditions, and similar matters. This document summarizes various sources of leave-related legal rights that might be available to California school employees who have concerns about their ability to work due to COVID-19.

Any CTA member needing assistance with these issues should contact their local chapter representative and/or their CTA Primary Contact Staff.



PUBLIC SCHOOL EMPLOYEE LEAVES FOR COVID-19

SB 95 - COVID-19 Supplemental Paid Sick Leave (Labor Code Section 248.2)

On March 29, 2021, California's SB 95 went into effect, requiring employers with more than 25 employees to provide 80 hours of paid sick leave when an employee is unable to work or telework because the employee:

- (1) Is experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 and is seeking a medical diagnosis;
- (2) Is subject to a quarantine or isolation period related to COVID-19 (though a general stay-at-home order does not count for this purpose);
- (3) Has been advised by a healthcare provider to self-quarantine due to concerns related to COVID-19;
- (4) Is attending an appointment to receive a COVID-19 vaccine;
- (5) Is experiencing symptoms related to a COVID-19 vaccine that prevent the employee from working or teleworking;
- (6) Is caring for a family member who is subject to a quarantine or isolation period and/or has been advised to self-quarantine; or
- (7) Is caring for a child whose school or place of care is closed or unavailable due to COVID-19 on the premises.

Although the leave went into effect on March 29, 2021, it is retroactive to January 1, 2021. If an employee took an unpaid leave for any of the above purposes between January 1 and March 29, they are entitled to be compensated for the leave upon request. The sick leave requirement of SB 95 expires September 30, 2021. An employer may not deny this sick leave based solely on a lack of a medical certification from a health care provider.

 See [DSLE's FAQs on COVID-19 Supplemental Paid Sick Leave](#)

American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA)

Beginning on April 1, 2021, employers, including local public school districts, are eligible for payroll tax credits to reimburse employers for voluntarily providing emergency paid sick leave and paid expanded family medical leave. The tax credit is applicable against employers' Medicare taxes, and any additional credit is refundable. Unlike the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), **employers are not required to provide the leave.** But to qualify for the credits, employers must provide the ARPA leaves outlined below without discriminating to favor (1) highly paid employees, (2) full-time employees, or (3) certain employees on the basis of employee tenure. The credits will be provided for leaves meeting the following conditions:

EMERGENCY PAID SICK LEAVE

ARPA provides tax credits for up to two weeks (80 hours, or a part-time employee's two-week equivalent) of paid sick leave to employees, even if the employee has exhausted their prior FFCRA emergency sick leave allotment. Leave may be used for three new purposes under the ARPA, including when an employee is unable to work or telework because the employee:

- (1) Is seeking or waiting for test results or medical diagnosis due to a COVID-19 exposure or because the employer has requested the employee be tested or diagnosed;
- (2) Is obtaining a vaccination; or
- (3) Is recovering from an "injury, disability, illness, or condition" related to vaccination.

The employee may also use the leave for the same purposes outlined previously in the FFCRA. Those are if the employee is unable to work or telework because the employee:

- (4) Is under a federal, state, or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19;
- (5) Has been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine due to COVID-19 concerns;
- (6) Is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and seeking a medical diagnosis;
- (7) Is caring for an individual who is subject to a quarantine or isolation order described in (4) or self-quarantine as described in (5);
- (8) Is caring for a son or daughter whose school or place of care has been closed (or childcare provider is unavailable) due to COVID-19; or
- (9) Is experiencing any other substantially similar condition specified by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

If the leave is related to the new ARPA purposes or to an employee's own quarantine or illness ((1)-(6) above), the tax credit provides for reimbursement of wages at an employee's full rate of pay, up to a maximum of \$511 per day and \$5,110 total. If the leave is related to caring for another individual ((4)-(6) above), the tax credit provides for reimbursement of wages at 2/3 of an employee's regular pay, with a cap of \$200 per day and \$2,000 total.

As noted above, California's SB 95 requires employers to provide up to 80 hours of COVID-related supplemental paid sick leave from January 1, 2021 through September 30, 2021. Thus, even if a California employer does not voluntarily extend ARPA's sick and medical leave expansions in exchange for tax credits, the employer must still provide up to 80 hours of supplemental sick leave required by SB 95 (assuming it has more than 25 employees).

EMERGENCY FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE EXPANSION

ARPA provides tax credits for employers that offer expanded leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

- Leave is available for the same nine reasons listed above that an employee may access emergency paid sick leave.
- Under FFCRA, the first 10 days were unpaid, but now under ARPA, the entire time is paid.
- The tax credit provides for reimbursement of wages up to 2/3 of the employee's regular pay, capped at \$200 per day and \$12,000 in the aggregate.

Continue to review your collective bargaining agreements for COVID-19 related leaves.

Exclusion Pay & Cal/OSHA's Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS)

- California's Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA) passed an Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) related to COVID-19 that requires employers to continue to provide full pay, benefits, and other employment rights (including job status) for employees who are excluded from the worksite due to a positive COVID-19 test or COVID-19 exposure and who are otherwise available and able to work. Typically, the ETS requires employers to exclude and continue to pay employees during the period of quarantine, which could be up to fourteen days.
- Employers are not required to provide these benefits if the employer can demonstrate that the exposure to COVID-19 was not work-related.
- Employees are not entitled to exclusion pay if they are reassigned to work from home.
- An employer may require employees to use COVID-19 Supplemental Paid Sick Leave (see above) before providing exclusion pay.
- The ETS emergency standard went into effect on November 30, 2020 and is currently scheduled to expire on October 2, 2021.
- See [Cal/OSHA's COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Standards FAQs on Exclusion Pay](#).

FMLA & California Family Rights Act (CFRA)

- FMLA (federal statute) and CFRA (state statute) provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave in a 12-month period for:
 - Employee's own serious health condition;
 - Family member's serious health condition; or
 - Child bonding within first year of birth; adoption, or foster care.
- To qualify, an employee must have worked at least 12 months and 1,250 hours in the preceding 12 months.
- COVID-19 should qualify as a "serious health condition" if it results in hospitalization, continuing treatment or supervision by a medical provider, or another serious condition such as pneumonia.
- Because CFRA does not cover pregnancy as a serious health condition, and California Pregnancy Disability Leave (PDL) separately provides leave for an employee disabled by pregnancy, an eligible employee can take pregnancy-disability leave in addition to a 12-week child bonding leave.
 - Note: The CDC identifies pregnancy as a condition that might cause increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. See [CDC website](#).
- See [Department of Fair Employment and Housing website](#).

California Education Code (EC)

CERTIFICATED EMPLOYEES

EC 44984 – Industrial Accident & Illness Leave

- An employee whose workers' compensation claim is approved is entitled to at least 60 days of full salary (when combined with temporary disability payments received for an approved workers' compensation claim).
- After this leave is exhausted, the employee is entitled to sick leave and differential pay leave.

EC 44978 – Sick Leave

- 10 days per year for full-time employees for illness or injury; pro-rated if part-time.
- Accumulates from year to year.
- Credit for sick leave need not be accrued by the employee prior to taking sick leave so it may be taken at any time during the school year.

EC 44977 – Differential Pay Leave

- Provides up to 5 school months of differential pay due to illness or accident after exhausting all annual and accumulated sick leave.
- Differential pay is regular salary MINUS the amount actually paid to a substitute OR, if no substitute is employed, the amount a substitute would have been paid.
 - But if district adopts 50 percent rule under EC 44983, employee must be paid at least 50 percent of regular pay after exhausting sick leave.
- Only one 5-month period allowed per illness/accident.

EC 44978.1 – Reemployment List

- When sick leave and differential pay are exhausted, and the employee is not medically able to resume work, the employee is placed on a reemployment list:
 - 24 months, if probationary;
 - 39 months, if permanent.
- When medically able, during the 24- or 39-month period, the employee *shall* be returned to employment in a position for which they are credentialed and qualified.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE ACADEMIC EMPLOYEES

EC 87787 – Industrial Accident & Illness Leave

- An employee whose workers' compensation claim is approved is entitled to at least 60 days of full salary (when combined with temporary disability payments).
- After this leave is exhausted, the employee is entitled to sick leave and differential pay leave.

EC 87781 – Sick Leave

- 10 days per year for full-time employees for illness or injury; pro-rated if part-time.
- Accumulates from year to year.
- Credit for sick leave need not be accrued by the employee prior to taking sick leave so it may be taken at any time during the school year.

EC 87780 – Differential Pay Leave

- Provides up to 5 school months of differential pay due to illness or accident after exhausting all annual and accumulated sick leave.

- Differential pay is regular salary MINUS the amount actually paid to a temporary employee who fills the position during the leave OR, if no temporary employee is employed, the amount a temporary employee would have been paid.
 - But if the district adopts 50 percent rule under EC 87786, employee must be paid 50 percent or more of regular pay after exhausting all sick leave.

PREK-12 CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEES

EC 45192 – Industrial Accident & Illness Leave

- An employee whose workers' compensation claim is approved is entitled to at least 60 days of full salary (when combined with temporary disability payments).
- After this leave is exhausted, the employee is entitled to sick leave, differential pay leave, accumulated compensating time, vacation, or other available leave.
- District may require minimum length of employment to qualify for benefits, not to exceed three years.

EC 45191 – Sick Leave

- 12 days per year for 12-month employees employed five days a week for illness or injury; pro-rated if employed less than 12 months or five days a week.
- Accumulates from year to year.
- Credit for sick leave need not be accrued by the employee prior to use. But new employees may not use more than six days (or proportionate amount, if part-time) until they complete six months of service.

EC 45196 – Differential Pay Leave

- Provides up to 5 months of differential pay due to illness or accident after exhausting all other available paid leave.
- Differential pay is regular salary MINUS the amount actually paid to a substitute.
 - Unlike EC 44977, the employer may not deduct the amount that a substitute "would have been paid." Thus, if the district does not actually employ a substitute to perform the absent employee's work, the employee should receive 100 percent of salary.
- Alternatively, the district may adopt a rule providing that a regular classified employee will receive at least 100 working days of paid sick leave each year paid at not less than 50 percent of the employee's regular salary. This rule results in combined sick leave and differential leave of at least 100 days each year.
- Unlike EC 44977, this section has no limitation of one 5-month period per illness/accident.

EC 45195 – Reemployment List

- When all sick leave, differential pay leave, vacation, compensating time, or other paid leave are exhausted, a permanent classified employee may apply for additional leave, paid or unpaid, for up to six months, which leave may be renewed for two additional six-month periods. The district is not required to grant the additional six-month leaves. If no additional leave is granted, or the leaves are exhausted, the employee will be placed on a reemployment list for 39 months.
 - If, during the discretionary leaves, the employee is able to resume their duties, the employee shall be restored to a position within the same classification.
 - When medically able, during the 39-month period, the employee *shall* be reemployed in the first vacancy for the employee's previous classification. The employee has priority over other applicants, except for laid off employees, in which case, the employee shall be ranked based on seniority.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEES

EC 88192 – Industrial Accident & Illness Leave

- An employee whose workers' compensation claim is approved is entitled to at least 60 days of full salary (when combined with temporary disability payments).
- After this leave is exhausted, the employee is entitled to sick leave, differential pay leave, accumulated compensating time, vacation, or other available leave.
- District may require minimum length of employment to qualify for benefits, not to exceed three years.

EC 88191 – Sick Leave

- 12 days per year for 12-month employees employed five days a week for illness or injury; pro-rated if employed less than 12 months or five days a week.
- Accumulates from year to year.
- Credit for sick leave need not be accrued by the employee prior to use. But new employees may not use more than six days (or proportionate amount, if part-time) until they complete six months of service.

EC 88196 – Differential Pay Leave

- Provides up to 5 months of differential pay due to illness or accident after exhausting all other available paid leave.
- Differential pay is regular salary MINUS the amount actually paid to a substitute.
 - Unlike EC 44977, the employer may not deduct the amount that a substitute would have been paid. Thus, if the district does not actually employ a substitute to perform the absent employee's work, the employee should receive 100 percent of salary.
- Alternatively, the college may adopt a rule providing that a regular classified employee will receive at least 100 working days of paid sick leave each year paid at not less than 50 percent of the employee's regular salary. This rule results in combined sick leave and differential leave of at least 100 days each year.
- Unlike EC 44977, this section has no limitation of one 5-month period per illness/accident.

EC 88195 – Reemployment List

- When all sick leave, differential pay leave, vacation, compensating time, or other paid leave are exhausted, a permanent classified employee may apply for additional leave, paid or unpaid, for up to six months, which leave may be renewed for two additional six-month periods. The college district is not required to grant the additional six-month leaves. If no additional leave is granted, or the leaves are exhausted, the employee will be placed on a reemployment list for 39 months.
 - If, during the discretionary leaves, the employee is able to resume their duties, the employee shall be restored to a position within the same classification.
 - When medically able, during the 39-month period, the employee shall be reemployed in the first vacancy for the employee's previous classification. The employee has priority over other applicants, except for laid off employees, in which case, the employee shall be ranked based on seniority.

Collective Bargaining Agreement

Don't forget to check the applicable collective bargaining agreement, which may provide greater or additional leave rights (e.g., catastrophic leave bank, personal necessity leave, etc.). Also, CTA chapters have been bargaining with districts over many COVID-19 matters, such as distance learning arrangements and safety measures. Employees should review those bargained provisions and address any questions to their local chapter.

Other Leaves

- The governing board of a public school employer *may* grant a leave of absence to any employee who is absent because of accident, illness, or quarantine which results from contact with other persons having a contagious disease while performing work. See EC 44964, EC 87765, EC 45199, EC 88199.
- Under California Labor Code sections 233 and 246.5 (“kin care” law), an employee may use accrued and available sick leave—up to the amount that would accrue during a six-month period—to attend to the diagnosis, care, or treatment of a covered family member (as defined in Labor Code section 245.5). See [Labor Commissioner's website](#).
- CTA members who are enrolled in CTA-endorsed Voluntary Disability Insurance through The Standard may be entitled to benefits as a result of the member's own disabling condition. The Standard will determine whether the member's receipt of paid sick leave impacts their approved claim based on the specific claim facts and the applicable policy provisions. For more information, contact The Standard at 800-522-0406 or visit CTAMemberBenefits.org/disability.
- CalSTRS Disability may be available to eligible unit members. See [CalSTRS website](#).



REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS FOR DISABLED PERSONS UNDER THE ADA

The federal Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12101 *et seq.*; 29 C.F.R. §§ 1630 *et seq.* (ADA) and California Fair Employment and Housing Act, Cal. Gov't Code §§ 12900-12996 (FEHA)

What employers are covered?

- ADA prohibits disability discrimination by employers with 15 or more employees.
- FEHA prohibits disability discrimination by employers with 5 or more employees.
- Several ADA and FEHA rights overlap. FEHA has some stronger state law-based protections.

What disabilities are covered?

- A qualifying “disability” can be a mental disability and/or a physical disability that limits one or more major life activities. This can include impairments of major life activities such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working. This can also include impairments of major bodily functions such as functions of the immune system, normal cell growth, digestive, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine, and reproductive functions.
- Various health conditions that may put individuals at high risk for COVID-19 complications are likely to qualify as “disabilities” under the law, such as chronic kidney disease, diabetes, and moderate-to-severe asthma. However, some conditions that might heighten risk for COVID-19 complications, such as age and tobacco use, are not disabilities under ADA/FEHA.

How do unit employees request a reasonable accommodation?

- ADA/FEHA requires that employers (including school districts, county offices of education, community colleges, and charter schools) provide “reasonable accommodations” to persons with qualifying disabilities, and the law prohibits retaliation against employees for asserting their rights under ADA/FEHA.
- An employer is required only to provide reasonable accommodation to employees and applicants with a known disability. If the employer is not aware of an employee’s disability, the employee should inform the employer that they have a disability-related limitation and, due to that limitation, they may need a reasonable accommodation to perform their job.
- A reasonable accommodation request can include a request to telework/perform distance learning. Temporary use of sick leave or other paid or unpaid leave might also be a reasonable accommodation.
- The employer must engage timely and in good faith in an “interactive process” with the employee to determine if there is a reasonable accommodation that will allow the employee to perform the essential functions of their job.
- Under California labor law, an exclusive representative has a right to represent a unit employee in the interactive process.
- The interactive process requires an individualized assessment of the job and the physical or mental limitations of the individual that are directly related to the need for a reasonable accommodation. The interactive process is a collaborative on-going discussion to arrive at a reasonable accommodation that enables the employee to perform the essential assigned duties of their position. There are no formal procedures to an interactive process meeting. Sometimes the interactive process involves multiple meetings and conversations.
- An employer, however, is not required to provide a reasonable accommodation that imposes an “undue hardship.” An accommodation is considered an undue hardship when it requires significant difficulty or expense to adopt and implement.
- An employer can reject an accommodation that eliminates an essential function of the job.

Do I need medical documentation to request a reasonable accommodation? If so, what should it include?

- An employer may request reasonable medical documentation that confirms the existence of a disability and the need for a reasonable accommodation.
- An employer may not request a specific medical diagnosis under FEHA. Medical documentation, however, should explain any disability-related limitations and possible accommodations that might enable the patient/employee to perform the essential functions of the job.
- The Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH), the agency tasked with enforcing FEHA, recommends that employers temporarily waive medical documentation requirements if it is impracticable for an employee to reasonably obtain documentation of a COVID-19-related disability.
- See [DFEH reasonable accommodation request form](#).

Where can I go to learn more about reasonable accommodations?

- See [reasonable accommodation page on DFEH website](#).
- See [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Enforcement Guidance: Reasonable Accommodation & Undue Hardship Under the ADA](#).



WORKERS' COMPENSATION

California Workers' Compensation System, Cal. Lab Code § 3200 et seq.

- With few exceptions, the Workers' Compensation system is the sole and exclusive remedy of an employee (or their dependents) against an employer for work-related death or injury.
- An eligible employee with a work-related injury or illness is entitled to partial wage replacement while they are recovering. A covered employer will also be required to pay for the employee's medical treatment.
- Senate Bill 1159 codified the protections in Governor Newsom's [Executive Order N-62-20](#), which had provided that all California employees who worked outside their home at the direction of their employer between March 19, 2020 and July 5, 2020 and who tested positive for COVID-19 within 14 days of working at their jobsite were presumed to have contracted any COVID-19-related illness at work for purposes of awarding workers' compensation benefits. The rebuttable presumption created by Executive Order N-62-20 expired on July 5, 2020, but SB 1159 extends that presumption through January 1, 2023. SB 1159 also applied the same presumption to employees who worked at the employer's location and had a positive test during an outbreak at the facility. This presumption for worksites where an outbreak has occurred is in effect until January 1, 2023.

- If an employee does not qualify for the presumption under Executive Order N-62-20 or SB 1159, they may still be eligible to receive workers' compensation benefits if they contracted COVID-19 at work. The employee will need to meet certain threshold requirements, including proving that their illness arose out of their employment.
- If you believe you contracted COVID-19 through work, notify your employer as soon as possible and promptly file a workers' compensation claim form with the employer.
- Although CTA's Group Legal Services Program does not cover Workers Compensation claims, CTA maintains a referral list of trusted employee-side Workers Compensation attorneys. Your CTA Primary Contact Staff can assist you if you wish to be referred to one of these attorneys.
- See [California Division of Workers' Compensation Q&As on Executive Order N-62-20](#), [Workers' Compensation Presumption \(SB 1159\) FAQs](#), and [California Division of Workers Compensation Guide to filing a Workers Compensation claim](#).

