

FAQs for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Issues and Temporary Duty (TDY) Travel

1. Can the employee make decisions about the method of transportation?

As specified by Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) §301-10.4, the agency, not the employee, selects the method of transportation. After considering alternative methods, such as video conferences, to conduct official business, agencies have the discretion to determine if official travel is required to accomplish the mission. The employee can use other methods of transportation, but is limited to a cost construct against the agency chosen method, as stated in FTR §301-10.6.

2. Must the agency choose the least expensive method of transportation?

The FTR §301-10.4 authorizes the agency to consider cost and other factors in choosing the method of transportation. While some factors are required, agencies may consider other factors that are not specified in the FTR and make a decision based on agency policy. For example, if an agency identifies that using a commercial flight is the least expensive method, it could still authorize the use of a personally owned vehicle (POV), Government vehicle (GOV), or rental car because they believe it is the method most advantageous to the Government.

3. Can the employee purchase two coach seats (i.e., aisle and middle seat) or a seat in other-than-coach class to maintain social distance on a flight?

No. There is no Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance that advises on purchase of other-than-coach class (first or business class) tickets or an extra middle seat for social distance to prevent contracting COVID-19. Purchasing a middle seat or upgrading to other-than-coach (first or business class) does not ensure that a 6-foot social distancing space will be maintained because 6 feet does not exist between seats even with that extra space. The FTR §301-10.123 does not address upgrades for pandemic conditions. However, upgrades may be authorized for exceptional security circumstances or to accommodate an employee's special needs. In addition, the FTR does allow for upgrades when required because of an agency mission, consistent with the agency's internal procedures.

4. Can the employee use a non-contract City Pair Program (CPP) fare to fly with another carrier?

If air travel is the authorized mode of transport and there is a CPP fare for the destination, the CPP fare must be used (FTR §301-10.106). FTR §301-10.107 specifies the exceptions for using a non-CPP fare. Travelers are required to use Government CPP, or if not eligible for CPP, fares would be limited to the lowest available full coach fare. Carrier preference is not a valid reason for using a non-contract fare (Note to FTR §301-10.108).

5. If a traveler is required to quarantine upon arriving at the Temporary Duty (TDY) location, will the Government reimburse the expense(s)?

Yes, if required by (Federal/Foreign) laws or Executive Orders to quarantine upon arrival at the TDY site, the Government will pay for the required quarantine. It is incumbent upon the agency to consider what will happen during this time period and if the employee can still help accomplish the mission during this period by working from the quarantine location, but there may be missions where the success of the mission requires it.

6. If the traveler returns from TDY, and is required to quarantine for 14 days, are they authorized to stay in a hotel before returning to their home?

Once the traveler has completed official travel and returned to their ultimate destination and (Federal/Foreign) laws or Executive Orders require a 14 day quarantine, the employee would be expected to quarantine in their place of residence. There is no quarantine guidance from the CDC that requires staying in a hotel. In addition, there is no authority under the FTR to pay per diem at an employee's official station.

7. Is being a person of increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 a special need?

The CDC guidelines for increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 are listed at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-increased-risk.html>.

It is up to the agency to determine an employee's special need and required accommodation(s) under the special needs rule of FTR part 301-13. Agencies should consult with their agency counsel, including civil rights counsel, in making this determination.

8. May an employee be reimbursed for personal protective equipment (PPE) to conduct official travel?

It is up to each individual agency to make the determination on whether to reimburse PPE, e.g., masks, hand sanitizer, etc, as a necessary travel expense.