

# WORKPLACE PUBLIC HEALTH RIGHTS



**COLORADO**  
Department of  
Labor and Employment

## COLORADO WORKPLACE PUBLIC HEALTH RIGHTS POSTER: PAID LEAVE, WHISTLEBLOWING, & PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

*Effective 1/1/22: may be updated annually;  
up - to - date poster available  
each mid - December*

### **THE HEALTHY FAMILIES & WORKPLACES ACT (“HFWA”): Paid Leave Rights**

#### **Coverage: All Colorado employers, of any size, must provide paid leave**

- Employees earn 1 hour of paid leave per 30 hours worked (“accrued leave”), up to 48 hours a year.
- Up to 80 hours of supplemental leave applies in a public health emergency (PHE), until 4 weeks after the PHE ends.\*
- Regular hours and pay set the rate of accrual and compensation for leave, during which benefits continue.
- Up to 48 hours of unused accrued leave carries over for use the next year.
- For details on specific situations (irregular hours, non-hourly pay, etc.), see Wage Protection Rule 3.5, 7 CCR 1103-7.

#### **Employees can use accrued leave for the following safety or health needs:**

- (1) a mental or physical illness, injury, or health condition that prevents work, including diagnosis or preventive care;
- (2) domestic abuse, sexual assault, or criminal harassment leading to health, relocation, legal, or other services needs;
- (3) has a family member experiencing a condition described in category (1) or (2); *or*
- (4) in a PHE, a public official closed the workplace, or the school or place of care of the employee’s child.

#### **In a public health emergency (PHE), employees can use supplemental PHE leave for the following needs\*:**

- (1) self-isolating or work exclusion due to exposure, symptoms, or diagnosis of the communicable illness in the PHE;
- (2) seeking a diagnosis, treatment, or care (including preventive care) of such an illness;
- (3) being unable to work due to a health condition that may increase susceptibility to or risk of such an illness; *or*
- (4) caring for a child or other family in category (1)-(3), or whose school or child care is unavailable due to the PHE.

During a PHE, employees still earn up to 48 hours of accrued leave and may use supplemental leave before accrued leave.

#### **Employer Policies (Notice; Documentation; Incremental Use; Privacy; and Paid Leave Records)**

- **Written notice and posters.** Employers must (1) provide notice to new employees no later than other onboarding documents/policies; and (2) display updated posters, and provide updated notices to current employees, by end of year.
- **Notice for “foreseeable” leave.** Employers may adopt “reasonable procedures” in writing as to how employees should provide notice if they require “foreseeable” leave, but cannot deny paid leave for noncompliance with such a policy.
- **An employer can require documentation to show that leave was for a qualifying reason only if leave was taken for four or more consecutive work days** (i.e. days on which an employee would have worked, not calendar days).
- **Documentation is not required to take paid leave**, but can be required as soon as an employee can provide it after returning to work or separating from work (whichever is sooner). **No documentation can be required for PHE leave.**
- **To document leave for an employee’s (or an employee’s family member’s) health-related need**, an employee may provide: (1) a document from a health or social services provider *if* services were received and document can be obtained in reasonable time and without added expense; **otherwise** (2) the employee’s own writing.
- **To document that an employee (or an employee’s family member) required leave for a need related to domestic abuse, sexual assault, or criminal harassment**, an employee may provide: a document or writing under (1) above (e.g. from a provider of legal or shelter services) or (2) above, or a legal document (e.g., a restraining order or police report).

- **If an employer reasonably deems an employee’s documentation deficient**, the employer must: (A) notify the employee within seven days of either receiving the documentation or the employee’s return to work or separation (whichever is sooner), and (B) give the employee at least seven days to cure the deficiency.
- **Incremental use.** Depending on employer policy, employees can use leave in either hourly or six-minute increments.
- **Employee Privacy.** Employers cannot require employees to disclose “details” about an employee’s (or their family’s) HFWA-related health or safety information; such information must be treated as a confidential medical record.
- **Records must be provided upon request.** Employers must provide documentation of the current amount of paid leave employees have (1) available for use, and (2) already used during the current benefit year, including any supplemental PHE leave. Information may be requested once per month or when the need for HFWA leave arises.

#### **Retaliation or Interference with HFWA Rights**

- **Paid leave cannot be counted as an “absence”** that may result in firing or another kind of adverse action.
- **An employee can’t be required to find a “replacement worker” or job coverage when taking paid leave.**
- **An employer cannot fire, threaten, or otherwise retaliate against, or interfere with use of leave by**, an employee who: (1) requests or takes HFWA leave; (2) informs or assists another person in exercising HFWA rights; (3) files a HFWA complaint; or (4) cooperates/assists in investigation of a HFWA violation.
- **If an employee’s reasonable, good-faith HFWA complaint, request, or other activity is incorrect**, an employer need not agree or grant it, but cannot *act against* the employee for it. Employees *can* face consequences for misusing leave.

### **THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY WHISTLEBLOWER LAW (“PHEW”): Worker Rights to Express Workplace Health Concerns & Use Protective Equipment**

#### **Coverage: All Employers and Employees, Plus Certain Independent Contractors**

- PHEW covers not just “employers” and “employees,” but all “principals” (an employer **or** a business with at least 5 independent contractors) and “workers” (employees **or** independent contractors at a “principal”).

#### **Worker Rights to Oppose Workplace Health/Safety Violations During Public Health Emergencies\*:**

- It is unlawful to retaliate against, or interfere with, the following acts during, and related to, a public health emergency:
  - (1) **raising reasonable concerns**, including informally, to the principal, other workers, the government, or the public, about workplace violations of government health or safety rules, or a significant workplace health or safety threat;
  - (2) **opposing or testifying, assisting, or participating** in an investigation ~~— or proceeding about retaliation for, or interference with, the above-listed conduct.~~
- A principal need not address a worker’s PHEW-related concern, but it still cannot fire or take other *action against* the worker for that reason, as long as the concern was reasonable and in good-faith.

#### **Workers’ Rights to Use Their Own Personal Protective Equipment (“PPE”):**

- A worker must be allowed to **voluntarily wear their own PPE** (mask, faceguard, gloves, etc.) if the PPE (1) provides **more protection** than equipment provided at the workplace, (2) is **recommended** by a government health agency (federal, state, or local), and (3) does not make the worker **unable to do the job**.

#### **COMPLAINT RIGHTS (under both HFWA & PHEW)**

- Report violations to the Division as complaints or anonymous tips, or file in court after exhausting pre-lawsuit remedies.

This Poster summarizes two Colorado workplace public health laws, SB 20-205 (paid leave) & HB 20-1415 (whistleblowing & personal protective equipment). It does not cover other health or safety laws, rules, and orders, including under the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), or from local public health agencies. Contact those agencies for such health and safety information.

This poster must be displayed where easily accessible to workers, shared with remote workers, provided in other languages as needed, and replaced with any annually updated versions.

This Poster is a summary and cannot be relied on as complete labor law information. For all rules, fact sheets, translations, questions, or complaints, or for the status of the public health emergency (\*a qualifying emergency remains in effect as of January 2022), contact:

DIVISION OF LABOR STANDARDS & STATISTICS, ColoradoLaborLaw.gov, cdle\_labor\_standards@state.co.us, 303-318-8441 / 888-390-7936.

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