



## COVID Premium Pay

### Contents

1. <b>Purpose</b> .....	1
2. <b>Applicability</b> .....	1
3. <b>Policy</b> .....	1
4. <b>Policy Non-Compliance</b> .....	3
5. <b>Audit</b> .....	3
6. <b>Definitions</b> .....	3
7. <b>Approval and Revision History</b> .....	4
8. <b>Background</b> .....	4

### 1. **Purpose**

The purpose of this premium pay is to provide a one-time monetary payment to select Buncombe County employees for specific levels of COVID-19 risk incurred from March 10, 2020 through March 10, 2021. This time period covers the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Buncombe County through the time period when vaccines were available to high-risk employees. The payment has specific eligibility requirements from the federal government in accordance with American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Fiscal Recovery Fund usage and is further defined by County specific requirements. Documentation of eligibility is required for all COVID premium pay payouts and is subject to federal audit.

### 2. **Applicability**

This policy applies to all Buncombe County departments and employees that meet eligibility requirements for the COVID premium payment by performing in-person work. Where there is conflict with any department-specific policy, this document will supersede.

### 3. **Policy**

#### 3.1. **Eligibility Requirements**

Buncombe County employees that are active at the time of COVID premium payout and also meet the following criteria may be eligible for COVID Premium Pay:

- Active Buncombe County employee between March 10, 2020 and March 10, 2021;
- The eligible duties are classified as essential in-person work related to Buncombe County's COVID-19 response;
- Non-Exempt or Exempt;
- Full time/part time regular, temporary, or grant employee;
- Employee worked in a public facing department and incurred risk based on the definitions in this policy by having direct or indirect contact with customers while providing critical services to protect the health and well-being of Buncombe County Residents or were reassigned to provide an Essential In-Person COVID-Response service to customers and can provide

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Workday COVID hour documentation for specific work performed for Buncombe County;

- Employee earns less than 150% of the North Carolina state average annual wage (\$76,515) after COVID premium pay is allocated, per U.S. Department of the Treasury - ARPA guidance;
  - With Department Director approval, the only exceptions considered will be for employees that performed high-risk first responder or public health duties. All exceptions require written documentation and explanation of the exceptional risk or hazard per Federal Guidelines.
- Tier category and eligibility is vetted and confirmed by the employee's department director.

### 3.2. Tiers

The following tiers further define specific eligibility for all or partial premium payment:

- 3.2.1. Core COVID - Employees who worked daily (at least 75% of each scheduled shift in the stated time period) on Core COVID response (or prorated based on approved hours according to hire date).
- 3.2.2. High-Risk - Employee is considered essential front-line staff and their position required them to have direct customer contact (at least 50% of each scheduled shift in the stated time period) during the stated time period (or prorated based on approved hours according to hire date) (*ex. First Responders*).
- 3.2.3. Medium to Low-Risk - Employee's position required them to have frequent indirect customer contact (at least 50% of each scheduled shift in the stated time period) during their scheduled hours during the stated time period (or prorated based on approved hours according to hire date) (*ex. front counter staff providing a mandated service and serving the public*).
- 3.2.4. COVID Reassignment - Employee logged approved hours for specific COVID-19 related activities in Workday that required direct customer contact. The logged hours must contain a listing of one of the following activities in the comment field: COVID-19 vaccine site work, COVID-19 testing site work, and COVID-19 supply delivery to the community.

### 3.3. Reporting Requirements

Reporting of recipient counts and dollars allocated will be provided to the federal government per ARPA guidelines in addition to supplemental justification as needed per section 3.1. COVID Premium Payments will also be subject to public records and relevant documents will be maintained for five (5) years.

- 3.3.1. For all employees that performed high-risk first responder or public health duties and exceed the 150% threshold per U.S. Department of the Treasury – ARPA guidance, required documentation must be provided that explains the specific duties performed as well as the heightened COVID-19 risk incurred by the employee.
- 3.3.2. For all employees that are designated in the COVID Reassignment tier by their department director, documentation of the COVID-19 work tags that are tied to eligible comments must be provided.

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### 3.4. Payout Calculation

Each eligibility tier has a corresponding monetary payment. Eligible staff that meet the criteria defined in section 3.1 and performed required duties on a full-time basis during the entire time period will receive the full payment amounts listed below, as long as payment does not increase their rate of pay above \$13/hour. Employees that were hired after March 10, 2020 or were scheduled for part-time work, will be paid at the prorated amount for each approved hour worked within the stated time period.

- Core COVID – a one-time payout of up to \$3,000, or prorated at \$1.44 per eligible hour
- High-Risk – a one-time payout of up to \$1,500, or prorated at .72 per eligible hour
- Medium to Low-Risk – a one-time payout of up to \$1,000, or prorated at .40 per eligible hour
- COVID Reassignment – payout for each approved, eligible hour at the rate of \$1.44 per hour with a maximum payout of no more than \$1,000.

Payment will be distributed through a regular payroll process at the end of December 2021 and will be treated as wages for tax, retirement, and withholding purposes.

### 4. Policy Non-Compliance

Employees willfully violating the terms and conditions of this policy may be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

### 5. Audit

All policies for Buncombe County may be subject to audit or review as outlined in the [Internal Auditor's Statement](#).

### 6. Definitions

- 6.1. Core COVID Response – work directly related to Buncombe County's critical COVID response including coordination, planning, and execution. The limited employees in this category were at the very center of critical COVID response coordination, planning, and expedited execution, often working 6-7 days a week to ensure positive and efficient outcomes for Buncombe County residents.
- 6.2. Customer – the general public outside of Buncombe County staff; this does not include vendors or contract employees
- 6.3. Essential – Employees whose functions are for the health and safety of the County or required by law. Essential for the sake of this premium pay must also have regularly performed in-person work and interacted with patients or the public, or physically handled items handled by others.
- 6.4. Essential In-Person COVID Response – Hours documented in Workday with COVID work tags and comments that include in-person work. The following activities are eligible assuming in-person customer contact was at the core of the work performed: testing site work, vaccine site work, supply delivery to the community, or work that meets the medium-low risk tier category.

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- 6.5. Type of Contact – Common items, shared surfaces, human interactions that are required to successfully perform job duties.
- 6.6. Direct Contact – Consistent, daily (at least 50% of each scheduled shift), physical contact with customers where physical or social distancing was not possible and there was a heightened risk to the employee
- 6.7. Indirect Contact – Consistent, daily (at least 50% of each scheduled shift), physical contact with customers behind a barrier or via shared surfaces where physical or social distance was possible, but a heightened risk to the employee was still present.

**7. Approval and Revision History**

Policy Origination Date:	December 7, 2021
Requires Board Approval:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Board Approval Date:	Date
Revision History:	12/7/21 – new policy created

**8. Background**

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