



Social Security Administration | Office of the Inspector General

Safety of Social Security Administration Employees and Visitors Since March 2020

A-15-20-51001

INTERIM RESPONSE

June 2021



Office of the Inspector General
SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

June 16, 2021

The Honorable John B. Larson
Chairman

The Honorable Tom Reed
Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Social Security
Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member:

In an August 7, 2020 letter, you asked that we review issues related to the Social Security Administration's handling of the safety of employees and visitors during in-person appointments after it closed field offices on March 17, 2020.

On January 14, 2021, we briefed your staff on the status of our work. In the enclosed interim response, we present the questions we asked the Social Security Administration and its responses, and we provide some preliminary observations. We are verifying the information in the Agency's responses and will provide a full report when our work is complete.

To ensure the Agency is aware of the information provided to your office, we are forwarding a copy of this correspondence to the Agency.

If you have any questions concerning this matter, please call me or have your staff contact Walter Bayer, Congressional and Intragovernmental Liaison, at (202) 358-6319.

Sincerely,

Gail S. Ennis
Inspector General

Background

Each year, approximately 28,000 Social Security Administration (SSA) employees assist over 40 million visitors in the Agency's 1,237 field offices and Social Security card centers across the United States. On March 13, 2020, the President declared the COVID-19 outbreak a national emergency. In response, on March 17, 2020, the Commissioner of SSA announced the closure of field offices and redirected customers to online and telephone service channels. Although offices have been closed to the general public since that date, SSA continues providing limited in-person services by appointment only.

On August 7, 2020, John B. Larson, Chairman, and Tom Reed, Ranking Member, Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Social Security, requested information on how SSA is handling the safety of employees and visitors for in-person appointments during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ This report presents our preliminary observations.

Preliminary Observations

*SSA Employees Working in Field Offices
During the*

Work Performed in Social Security Administration Field Offices

Since March 17, 2020, the public has entered SSA field offices by appointment only. According to SSA, during these in-person appointments, employees process

- requests for Social Security number cards if the applicants (a) are age 12 or older and applying for a card for the first time or (b) need to update or correct information (such as name, date of birth, or citizenship) to obtain income, resources, medical care or coverage, or other services or benefits;
- immediate payments to beneficiaries/recipients who are in dire need;²
- death correction cases that require face-to-face interviews; and
- primary identification documents SSA needs to adjudicate retroactive benefits.

¹ See Appendix A for the request, Appendix B for our scope and methodology, and Appendix C for additional questions we asked SSA and the Agency's responses.

² A dire-need situation exists when a claimant alleges he/she is without food and cannot obtain it, lacks medicine or medical care and cannot obtain it, or lacks shelter.

In addition, SSA reported that a limited number of authorized employees, mostly managers, enter field offices to perform mission-critical work that cannot be done remotely, such as opening mail, sending documents to remote workers that require SSA’s action, and facilitating the return of documents to the public. Employees must also report to field offices to address administrative tasks that cannot be handled remotely, including renewing employee credentials or resolving information technology issues.

Effective May 28, 2021, SSA expanded nation-wide implementation of express interviews in all field offices and card centers. During express interviews, Agency staff pre-screens customers over the telephone to verify the need for face-to-face visits to ensure the time customers spend in the office is brief (approximately 5 to 7 minutes).

As part of our continuing work on this matter, we are gathering information from field office employees to confirm SSA’s description of the in-office workloads employees have performed since March 17, 2020.

Employees and Visitors to Social Security Administration’s Field Offices During the Pandemic

Although SSA’s approximately 28,000 field office and card center employees assist over 40 million visitors each year nationwide, SSA’s data reflected a significant reduction in the number of employees and visitors who entered field offices during the pandemic (see Table 1).

Table 1: Number of Employees and Visitors Who Entered SSA’s Field Offices

	Employees (March 30, 2020 to April 30, 2021)	Visitors (March 17, 2020 to April 30, 2021)
Daily Average	2,154	1,645
Total	N/A	483,531
Highest Number in All Offices on a Single Day	3,155	5,050
Highest Number in a Single Office on a Single Day	34 ³	218 ⁴

³ SSA does not know the total number of employees who entered Agency facilities because SSA separately counts each employee every time. For example, if an employee comes into the office Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, the SSA count is three employees instead of one.

⁴ Source: SSA. We are verifying the accuracy and completeness of this information.

The Social Security Administration's Safety Measures During the Pandemic

To protect employees and visitors to its field offices and card centers, SSA reported it

- requires that employees take mandatory safety training, and it issues reminders to all employees on the need for good hygiene practices,⁵ particularly after touching shared surfaces and objects;
- displays signage concerning safe workplace practices, such as how to properly use face coverings, self-screen for symptoms, and practice hand hygiene;
- has purchased face coverings and hand sanitizer for employees and cleaning supplies for workstations;
- requires that employees complete a health self-screening before they enter an SSA facility;
- requires that everyone who enters an SSA facility wear a face covering and provides a face covering at no cost, if needed;
- requires that everyone who enters an SSA facility comply with physical distancing guidelines (that is, maintain at least 6 feet between oneself and others while in the facility);
- has purchased gloves for employees to wear when handling mail and released an instructional video on the proper way to use and dispose of gloves;
- has enhanced daily cleaning of high-touch surfaces in common areas, such as handrails, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, tabletops, and water faucets;
- has installed barriers for employees who conduct face-to-face public interactions;
- encourages employees to clean their desk surfaces frequently; and
- encourages employees and managers to clean high-touch surfaces between visitors.

We continue gathering information to verify SSA's safety measures.

⁵ SSA expects employees to use hand sanitizer or clean their hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds using soap and warm water.

Contact Tracing

According to SSA, its Medical Office staff follows the latest Centers for Disease Control and Prevention criteria when an employee may have been exposed to COVID-19. The Medical Office staff provides managers standard language for notifying employees and individuals about potential exposure. The notification advises individuals whether they have been exposed to COVID-19 on a specific date(s) and whether there is a need to quarantine. The notification does not identify the individual who tested positive to protect that individual's privacy. SSA also reported that, when possible, Medical Office staff shares information with local health departments.

SSA's contact tracing capabilities are limited because SSA does not centrally maintain the names of employees who enter SSA facilities. In addition, SSA does not maintain contact information for all visitors to SSA facilities. SSA maintains only daily counts (without contact information) of certain visitors to its field offices and card centers. For example, if a beneficiary visits a field office with his/her representative payee, SSA tracks the beneficiary but not the representative payee in its daily totals. SSA also does not maintain contact information for contractors (such as security guards and cleaning staff) who work in field offices and card centers. This lack of information impairs SSA's ability to support local health departments with their contact tracing efforts.

Next Steps

We continue gathering information from employees and managers in SSA offices nationwide to verify the information in this response. We also continue engaging with Agency leadership to obtain additional information regarding SSA's efforts to ensure the health and safety of employees and the public in SSA facilities during the pandemic. Among other questions, we are surveying employees and interviewing managers in certain field offices to determine whether (1) SSA follows the safety standards noted above and (2) employees provide limited in-person services as those described above. Once our work is complete, we will issue a final report that incorporates and expands on the preliminary observations in this interim report.

SSA provided technical comments, which we incorporated into this response. SSA had no further comments (see Appendix D).



Michelle L. Anderson
Assistant Inspector General for Audit

Appendix A – Congressional Request Letter

JOHN B. LARSON
CONNECTICUT,
CHAIRMAN

BILL PASCRELL JR., NEW JERSEY
LINDA T. SANCHEZ, CALIFORNIA
DAN KILDEE, MICHIGAN
BRENDAN BOYLE, PENNSYLVANIA
BRAD SCHNEIDER, ILLINOIS
BRIAN HIGGINS, NEW YORK

KATHRYN OLSON,
STAFF DIRECTOR

Congress of the United States U.S. House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY

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TOM REED
NEW YORK,
RANKING MEMBER

JOEY ARRINGTON, TEXAS
DREW FERGUSON, GEORGIA
RON ESTES, KANSAS

AMY SHUART,
STAFF DIRECTOR

August 7, 2020

Gail S. Ennis
Inspector General
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21207

Dear Inspector General Ennis:

To ensure the safety of Social Security Administration (SSA) employees as well as the individuals they serve, the Commissioner of Social Security closed field offices to most employees and the public on Tuesday, March 17, 2020. Since this closure, the agency has primarily continued to support service delivery and real-time to meet its mission by phone and online. When service cannot be performed by phone or online, SSA provides in-person service by appointment only for limited, dire need situations. We are aware that SSA recently issued guidance, *COVID-19 UPDATE: Safety Protocols and FAQs*, related to employee and visitor safety issues. To gain a better understanding of how SSA is handling the safety of employees and visitors during in-person appointments, we request that your office:

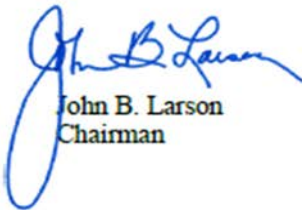
1. Determine how many SSA employees have continued to work in agency facilities conducting in-person appointments since the agency closed field offices.
 - a. Determine what types of duties these employees are performing during these in-person appointments.
 - b. Determine where these in-person appointments are being held.
2. Determine how many visitors SSA has already assisted in-person since it closed field offices.
 - a. Determine what types of in-person services visitors are requesting.
 - b. Determine what types of in-person services SSA has provided to visitors.
3. Determine what personal protective equipment, cleaning supplies, and other safety measures have been required for employees and visitors in SSA facilities since it closed field offices.

Letter to Inspector General Ennis
August 7, 2020
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4. Provide any observations you may have regarding the agency's employee and visitor safety efforts to date.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request. Should you or your staff have any questions, please contact Kathryn Olson, the Social Security Subcommittee Majority Staff Director, at kathryn.olson@mail.house.gov, and Amy Shuart, the Social Security Subcommittee Republican Staff Director, at amy.shuart@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,



John B. Larson
Chairman



Tom Reed
Republican Leader

Appendix B – Scope and Methodology

To accomplish our objective, we:

- Reviewed the Social Security Administration’s responses to the requests from Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Social Security, and additional questions we asked in the Start Notice for this review.
- Reviewed applicable guidance from the Office of Management and Budget, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, White House, and Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

We conducted our review between August 2020 and May 2021 in Baltimore, Maryland. The principal entity reviewed was the Agency’s Office of the Deputy Commissioner for Operations. We did not independently verify the reliability of the Agency’s responses or data.

Appendix C – Start Notice Questions and Answers

1. The Commissioner of the Social Security Administration (SSA) closed field offices on March 17, 2020. Do field offices follow State, regional, or national guidance for employees and contractors (including security guards) entering SSA facilities?

We are considering state health factors and our offices follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [CDC] guidance including:

- Employees must complete a daily self-screening prior to reporting to the workplace.
- Any person entering our workplace is required to wear a face covering.
- Everyone must comply with the CDC social distancing guidelines, maintaining at least 6 feet apart from others while in the office.
- Hand sanitizer is readily available.
- Gloves are available for use during mail handling and upon request.
- We installed additional temporary barriers reception and interview areas.

The public will continue to enter our offices by appointment only. Employees may not congregate in common areas.

2. Do field offices follow State, regional, or national guidance for SSA employees to conduct in-person office visits with the public?

Our field offices follow agency national guidance regarding the workloads that require in-office appointments, which are restricted to certain critical services.

3. Are those States that are not highly affected by COVID-19 allowing more employees and visitors in the offices than States that are highly effected?

At this time, our offices in all States limit onsite staff and visitors to the level needed to support mission-critical non-portable functions (such as limited in-office appointments, opening mail and getting it to remote workers for action, and returning documents to the public) and critical, non-portable administrative work (e.g., renewing HSPD-12 PIV credentials or information technology [IT] equipment issues). Workloads will drive how many employees and visitors in our offices. Based on the specific in-office workload need, we will consider local health indicators to determine how many employees we can bring into the office to address the workload need--but still a limited number where we can ensure steps like social distancing.

4. What workloads does SSA consider mission-critical and/or dire need and would therefore require an in-person service?

We continue to restrict in-person interviews to dire need situations, including, but not limited to:

- Original and replacement Social Security number [SSN] cards,
 - if they are age 12 or older applying for their first SSN card; or
 - if they need to update or correct their SSN information (such as name, date of birth, or citizenship) to obtain income, resources, or medical care or coverage, or other services or benefits.
- Immediate Payments expedited in the field office based on dire need.
- Death correction cases that do not meet face-to-face exceptions.

a. Are employees going into offices for any reason other than mission critical and/or dire need work? If so, please provide the reasons.

No.

b. If SSA considers a workload as dire need that requires an in-office visit, what prevents that workload from being conducted over the telephone or virtually? Please describe each type of workload identified as dire and in-person.

Our regulations require an in-person interview for certain requests for an original SSN card for an individual 12 or older or for certain non-citizens.

For immediate payments and check redirects, we first try to address the request over the phone and through the mail, but we offer in-person appointments to ensure payment continuity for high risk or vulnerable populations in situations where other options do not address the immediate need for funds.

We require an in-person interview to verify identity for death corrections, which represent a high risk for fraud.

5. How is each field office monitoring who is going into an office each day, including employees, visitors, and contractors (including security guards)?

Managers oversee individuals who must visit an office; this includes employees, security guards, and visitors with an in-person appointment.

6. How are you tracking the number of visitors? Is each visitor counted individually? For example, would a family be considered one visitor or multiple? Is this tracking policy consistently applied throughout all field offices?

Field office managers track in-person visitors using a designated SharePoint site. Each day, managers record the number of individual visitors to whom the field office provided dire need assistance and the reason for the visit. We allow only the individual requesting service to enter unless he or she requires assistance or has a representative. In those situations, only one assistant or representative is allowed. We count only the individual needing to conduct business with us.

a. Where and how is visitor information stored?

Field office managers follow national guidance for reporting dire need visitor counts and the reason for the visit via a SharePoint site used by all offices in Operations.

b. Who has access to this information?

Access to the national SharePoint site is restricted to Operations management in supervisory positions and, in some limited cases, to executive support staff responsible for reporting and tracking management information.

7. How often are employees working in the field offices?

A minimum number of authorized personnel are onsite in field offices to handle critical, non-portable workloads and administrative tasks. Depending on workload demands and availability of authorized personnel, the frequency is up to 5 days a week.

8. How often are visitors allowed in the field offices?

The frequency of visitors varies by field office. We schedule in-person interviews as needed and depending on staff availability. In some offices, we may not have a dire-need interview for several weeks, and in other offices with a high demand for in-person interviews (most often for SSN Card services), we may have interviews several times a week, or even daily. Managers allow time between interviews to allow for social distancing.

a. How far in advance are appointments made with the public?

We schedule most in-person interviews within a few business days of the referral for an individual with a potential need for in-person service. However, if there is high demand, appointments may not be immediately available due to limited on-site staff and time necessary to limit interaction between visitors and ensure social distancing. Security guards must also be available onsite for all in-office appointments. If an individual is under quarantine, managers will schedule an appointment after the end of the quarantine period.

b. Does SSA send health reminders to those with appointments? If so, how are those reminders issued? How are they enforced?

While we do not send health reminders in advance of the appointment, we screen potential visitors for COVID-19 symptoms or exposure when we schedule appointments. When visitors arrive for their appointments, they self-screen again when entering the office.

When we schedule appointments, we ask the caller about any symptoms, exposures, or positive diagnosis. If a caller answers yes to any of the screening questions, we reschedule service for a later time. We also inform the caller that only the individual needing the service and, if necessary, one assistant or representative may attend the appointment. We advise the caller that we require everyone visiting our facilities to wear face coverings and to call to reschedule the appointment if they experience any COVID-19 symptoms.

Our field offices display signage concerning COVID-19 safety requirements. Security guards refer visitors to the signage to self-screen for COVID-19 symptoms or exposure and enforce the face-covering requirement prior to allowing visitors to enter an office. If a visitor is not wearing a face covering, guards will direct them to use a face covering we provide (available near the public entrance of each office). If a visitor enters a field office and displays symptoms, the manager will request the visitor to leave and advise the individual to reschedule the in-person service when the individual is no longer symptomatic.

9. How would an employee, contractor (including security guards), and/or visitor make a report if they have tested positive for COVID-19 or presumed positive after going into the office?

We have instructed employees and contractors to report a positive diagnosis to their supervisors or contracting officers. The supervisors or contracting officers report any positive tests to the SSA Medical Office.

Visitors may report positive tests to the field office where served; however, we have no mechanism to require them to report. A State health department may alert us about individuals who have visited our offices during contact tracing efforts. Offices report visitors who have tested positive to the SSA Medical Office. Security guards report positive test results to their employers who then report the results to a Federal Protective Service Contracting Officer.

a. What actions are taken to sanitize the office if this occurs?

We follow CDC cleaning protocols after any exposures. If employees or contractors must enter a field office, a contractor will conduct an enhanced cleaning. If a field office is empty for at least 7 days after an exposure, the office will receive normal cleaning prior to reentry in accordance with CDC guidelines.

b. How do you make other employees and visitors aware of the possible exposure?

In consultation with the SSA Medical Office, managers notify the employees and visitors who may have been exposed. Together with the SSA Medical Office and public health departments, managers trace contacts within the workplace to determine who may have been exposed, in accordance with CDC guidelines. The SSA Medical Office provides managers with standard language for notifying employees and visitors if they may have been exposed, which does not disclose the identity of the person who tested positive. The notification advises individuals that they may have been exposed during specific dates and that they should quarantine for 14 days.

c. Have any offices had to shut down for several days or weeks because of an exposure (or possible exposure)?

Yes. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, a handful of offices have had to close to in-person service due to a positive exposure.

d. How is the privacy of those who report protected?

The identity of an individual is shared only with the manager who works with the SSA Medical Office on contact tracing. We comply with applicable privacy and confidentiality laws in our maintenance and disclosure of report information, such as those in the Privacy Act of 1974 and workplace anti-discrimination laws.

10. How are field offices keeping employees safe when a visitor needs to provide documents with possible surface contamination, such as a driver's license or birth certificate?

Per the CDC, COVID-19 spreads mainly from person-to-person contact through respiratory droplets. Therefore, everyone in our offices must wear a face covering, and practice social distancing. We have installed barriers between the public and employees when exchanging documents. Simple practices like hand washing and not touching one's face with unclean hands are critical. We follow CDC guidelines for handwashing and the use of hand sanitizer, and we make gloves available for employee use. We have provided mandatory training and reminders for all employees on the need for good hygiene practices, particularly after touching shared surfaces and objects. We encourage our employees to clean their hands and their desk surfaces frequently. We provide hand sanitizer to employees at all interviewing windows.

a. How are employees keeping visitors safe when they return original documents and issue receipts/documents?

Per the CDC, COVID-19 spreads mainly from person-to-person contact through respiratory droplets. Therefore, everyone in our offices must wear a face covering, and practice social distancing. We have installed barriers between the public and employees when exchanging documents. Simple practices like hand washing and not touching one's face with unclean hands are critical. We follow CDC guidelines for handwashing and the use of hand sanitizer, and we make gloves available for employee use. We have provided mandatory training and reminders for all employees on the need for good hygiene practices, particularly after touching shared surfaces and objects. We encourage our employees to clean their hands and their desk surfaces frequently. We also provide hand sanitizer for visitors to use.

11. How often are field offices cleaned?

Based on CDC guidance, offices receive routine, daily cleaning and disinfection of high-contact surfaces in common and high-traffic areas (e.g., field office lobby).

a. Are there specific sanitizing procedures to follow after each visitor?

Based on CDC guidance, the General Services Administration (GSA), through amended lease agreements with lessors, arranged enhanced daily cleaning of high touch surfaces in common areas in offices such as handrails, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, table tops, water faucets, etc. We provide hand sanitizer for visitors to use before or after service. We also provide cleaning supplies for employees to clean their workspaces, and we encourage managers to clean high-touch surfaces between visitors. The best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is for employees and visitors to wash their hands frequently or use sanitizer, wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and keep their hands away from their faces.

b. Are there specific sanitizing procedures to follow after employees and contractors (including security guards) have been in the office?

As mentioned above, GSA is working with the lessors to enhance the daily cleaning of high touch surfaces in office common areas. We arranged for additional enhanced cleaning protocols according to CDC guidance for facilities with confirmed COVID-19 exposure where employees must enter the buildings. Employees are responsible for cleaning their personal areas using the cleaning supplies we provide.

12. Provide a list of all employees and contractors (including security guards) who have entered any SSA facility since March 17 and the reason they entered facility.

We do not maintain a list of all employees and contractors who have entered SSA facilities since March 17.

13. Provide a list of all visitors who have entered any SSA facility since March 17 and the reason for the visit.

We do not maintain a list of all visitors who have entered SSA facilities since March 17th.

14. What personal protective equipment [PPE] has SSA purchased for staff, contractors, and visitors?

Under the code of Federal regulations [CFR] at 29 CFR 1910.132, the term “PPE” has a technical definition. Therefore, we use the term Personal Protective Supplies [PPS]. We have purchased PPS including face coverings for our employees and the public, gloves, hand sanitizer, and cleaning supplies. We have been installing barriers, especially where face-to-face public service occurs and no other barriers are present. We display signage concerning safe workplace practices such as the use of face coverings, self-screening for symptoms, and practicing hand hygiene in all of our facilities nationwide.

15. Has SSA had any problems obtaining PPE?

We have been able to obtain PPS.

16. Are there any offices that do not have PPE at all or incomplete PPE? If so, please provide a listing of those offices.

All offices report that they have adequate supplies for our current operating status. Offices must have PPS in order to allow employees onsite.

17. On July 20, 2020, SSA implemented safety protocols for all employees, contractors, and visitors. How is SSA communicating these requirements?

We communicated our safety protocols to all employees on July 17, 2020 via a Human Resources Internal Communication message, and managers remind employees of these protocols. We posted COVID-19 FAQs for Contractors and Subcontractors with Employees Working at SSA Facilities on the Office of Acquisition and Grants [OAG] Internet website on March 17, 2020, and updated it on July 16, 2020. OAG alerted contracting staff and contracting officer’s representatives to these postings and asked them to share this information with contractors and subcontractors by directing them to the OAG Intranet website, under the Important Alerts tab. The protocols remain available on the SSA Medical Office webpage and in our employee Frequently Asked Questions document. We also implemented scripts when scheduling appointments to share our protocols with visitors at the time appointments are set and to screen visitors. We have protocols displayed on posters at offices and security guards refer visitors to the posters and enforce face-covering requirements.

a. How is SSA going to enforce this policy?

Our managers will enforce this policy through normal management directives and disciplinary efforts if necessary. We have signage posted to remind visitors to perform standard health screening protocols. Security guards will enforce the wearing of face-coverings by members of the public, before visitors enter our facilities. Security guards enforce or require visitors to leave, if needed. Contracting officers will enforce applicable contract requirements through appropriate acquisition channels should any instance of non-compliance arise with a contractor.

b. How is SSA ensuring social distancing in field offices?

We currently limit the number of employees in field offices and allow visitors by appointment only. The appointment-only service model allows us to ensure physical distancing between visitors and staff. Field offices display signage to reinforce social distancing requirements. When visitors arrive, managers direct visitors to a specific interviewing window. Managers ensure onsite authorized personnel are not working in adjacent cubicles or work spaces. The office common areas and restrooms are also restricted to ensure social distancing can occur.

c. The policy references training for masks and gloves. Is SSA tracking whether employees have completed this training before they go into an office? How are contractors (including security guards) and visitors going to take this training?

We are tracking the completion of the face-coverings video training centrally and reinforcing face-covering protocols locally. We administered the training via our agency-wide learning management system, which tracks employee completion and requires employees to certify that they completed the training. Additionally, the learning management system notifies the employee and his or her manager if the employee has not completed the training by the deadline. Visitors are not required to take the video training.

Training on glove removal is optional since glove usage is optional, but recommended for those who choose to use gloves. We have reinforced hand hygiene practices since March 2020, and we continue to emphasize it as the best method for reducing the spread of infection and preventing cross-contamination.

18. The Food and Drug Administration has issued warnings for certain hand sanitizers. How will SSA ensure purchased hand sanitizers are not on this list?

We released an acquisition alert to all purchase cardholders to notify them of the approved hand sanitizers for purchase. The alert also included the FDA warning list so managers know what products they should not purchase. In addition, the SSA Medical Office reviewed the sanitizer product specifications for central sanitizer procurements prior to award to ensure compliance with FDA guidance.

19. Has SSA changed (or made plans to change) field office space to further protect employees and visitors? For example, updating ventilation systems, adding Plexiglas, ensuring social distancing in waiting areas, installing kiosks, cleaning procedures.

We require social distancing in our offices. We continue to examine CDC, American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers, and GSA ventilation recommendations and employ appropriate and feasible enhancements, where possible. We installed, and continue to install additional, clear acrylic barrier walls to protect employees and the public during in-person transactions. Offices must have soap, hand sanitizer, and cleaning supplies available before staff return to the office. GSA, through amended lease agreements with lessors, provides enhanced daily cleaning of high touch surfaces in common areas in offices such as handrails, door knobs, light switches, countertops, table tops, water

faucets, etc. We display signage about our COVID-19 policies in all of our facilities nationwide. We are analyzing the potential implications of the pandemic on our long-term space planning initiatives.

20. Are there procedures to protect employees who handle mail in SSA field offices from possible surface contamination?

Per the CDC, COVID-19 spreads mainly from person-to-person contact through respiratory droplets. Therefore, everyone in our offices must wear a face covering, and practice social distancing. Employees must also complete a self-health check every day before reporting to an SSA facility. Employees use gloves, which we provide, when handling mail. We developed and released an instructional video on the proper way to put gloves on and more importantly, the proper way to take gloves off and dispose of them. Employees should follow the CDC guidance to use hand sanitizer or to clean their hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds using soap and warm water.

Appendix D – Agency Comments



SOCIAL SECURITY

MEMORANDUM

Date: June 4, 2021

Refer To: TQA-1

To: Gail S. Ennis
Inspector General

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Scott Frey".

From: Scott Frey
Chief of Staff

Subject: Office of the Inspector General Interim Response “Safety of Social Security Administration Employees and Visitors Since March 2020” (A-15-20-51001) -- INFORMATION

Thank you for the opportunity to review the interim response for this audit. We have no comment.

Please let me know if I can be of further assistance. You may direct staff inquiries to Trae Sommer at (410) 965-9102.