

Department of Labor & Industries (L&I)
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
IMEs and Coronavirus (COVID-19)
Last Updated: March 25, 2020

Will we be able to continue doing IMES during the COVID-19 outbreak?

There is no plan at this time to cease doing all IMEs. L&I is paying close attention to the public health response and will respond accordingly if the situation changes.

Are IME last-minute cancelation fees going to be waived for workers who do not want to travel due to the COVID-19 outbreak?

We are not assessing fees for good cause scenarios now, including the COVID-19 outbreak. However, we ask that workers notify their Claim Managers as soon as possible.

How will cancelations and rescheduling of IMEs be managed?

The highest priority IMEs will be rescheduled first. These include any request that has time limitations, such as re-openings and resumption for IME on appeal. Firms should consider their ability to perform the exam within the timeframe needed on priority exams. Non-priority exams should be scheduled out based on availability.

If there is no possibility of rescheduling within the timeframe needed, the referral will be canceled and other options considered, such as consultations.

Communication is key. Please contact the Scheduling Unit as soon as possible for any scheduling issues.

In preparation for an upcoming IME, an examiner conducted and dictated for transcription a detailed record review. How can compensation be provided for this already completed work if the worker cancels the IME at the last minute due to the COVID-19 outbreak, and the IME is not rescheduled with the same IME firm? NOTE: This scenario is different than a late cancelation, wherein no prior work has been completed by the examiner and no documentation is required to be submitted to L&I.

In this scenario, i.e., *late cancelations only and not reschedules*, where the examiner has already completed the record review and dictation in advance of the IME, the examiner should complete a full record review and submit that report to L&I. This process will be in place through July 3, 2020, unless it is determined that an extension is needed.

To bill for this record review, contact [Teri Baughman](#) for preauthorization. Once the service is preauthorized, use code 1124M – “other, by report” – to bill for the record review, which pays \$381.81. Additional pages over 400 may also be billed using this code and pays at \$1.09/page. Note that “time” is not a billable service. Again, this is not the same process as a “late cancelation.”

How do we know what IME firm and examiner capacity is available to continue performing IMEs?

L&I asks that the IME firms conduct a self-inventory of the availability of their examiners and specialties, and provide their overall examiner availability due to the COVID-19 concerns. Individual examiner information is not required. We are monitoring any shortage of specialties and overall examiner capacity. This information should be forwarded to [Kristen Baldwin-Boe](#). Firms should update this information as changes in examiner availability occur.

Is there any consideration given to conduct IMEs via telemedicine?

To help support containment of the COVID-19 outbreak, mental health IMEs are now allowed to be conducted via telemedicine through July 3, 2020, unless it is determined that an extension is needed. Injured workers are allowed to use their home as an origination site when a telemedicine mental health IME is conducted so long as the worker has the ability to use their home as the origination site. See L&I's [Temporary Telehealth Policy](#). The Claim Manager must be contacted first to ensure there is agreement from the worker/attorney in order to change the exam type to telemedicine. In order to do mental health IMEs via telemedicine, the following must be considered:

- The mental health IME must include BOTH audio and visual technology, with a high-speed internet connection with reliable connectivity.
- All parties, including the worker, employer, attorney, etc., must agree to a mental health IME via telemedicine.

Notify [Kristen Baldwin-Boe](#) if the IME firm has capability to conduct telemedicine mental health IMEs.

If a mental health IME is conducted via telemedicine with the worker at home, what is the assurance that the IME is not being recorded?

Under WAC 296-23-367, the use of recording equipment of any kind by the worker or accompanying person is not allowed. The worker should be reminded of this prior to the telemedicine mental health IME.

Is there consideration to suspend the 14-day late IME report process during this time?

Under WAC 296-23-347, IME reports received after 14 calendar days may be paid at a lower rate per the fee schedule. Considering the COVID-19 outbreak, L&I is suspending any new orders related to fee reductions effective immediately, and until at least July 3, 2020. However, there is still the expectation that IME reports should be completed as soon as possible so as not to delay potential care, PPD payments or time loss payments to workers.

How can we ensure that new examiner applications, or applications adding practice locations, get through the credentialing process quickly?

The processing of new IME applications, or those expanding their exam sites, will be handled as a priority work item to ensure ongoing access to IMEs for workers.

How does Self-Insurance employers and TPAs work into these processes?

L&I cannot make decisions on Self-Insurance IMEs. The employer/TPA should be contacted directly to obtain agreement and authorize use of these alternative IME processes.

When diagnostic studies are needed to complete the exam, but there is a delay in scheduling the studies, should the report be sent to L&I noting a delay in diagnostic studies?

Yes, send the report to L&I. A billable addendum can then be provided if necessary once the diagnostic studies are received.

What resources are available to answer further questions, including personal protective equipment (PPE) recommendations for businesses?

Resources available to assist with questions include the following:

- Washington State Department of Health coronavirus webpage:
[Department of Health emergency coronavirus page.](#)
[Department of Health Novel Coronavirus Outbreak 2020.](#)
- State Department of Health [workplace and employer recommendations.](#)
- [World Health Organization \(WHO\) coronavirus resources.](#)
- [OSHA coronavirus resources.](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention coronavirus resources.](#)
- [Environmental Protection Agency coronavirus disinfectants.](#)