



Human Resources Department

New Employee Orientation

Frequently Asked Questions

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The presenters from New Employee Orientation have compiled a list of frequently asked questions. It is our hope that this information is useful. If your question was not answered during orientation, or you have a question at a later date, please refer to this guide.



Deferred Compensation 457b Plan with Empower Retirement

1. Is there a certain time that I can enroll?

You can enroll in the City of Houston Deferred compensation plan at any time.

2. I am working part time for the City of Houston. Am I eligible to enroll now, or do I have to wait until I am full-time?

All current full-time and regular part-time City of Houston employees are immediately eligible to participate in the plan.

3. What is the minimum amount that I can contribute into the plan?

The minimum contribution amount is \$15 per paycheck.

4. Can I change my contribution amount when I want to?

Yes, you are able to change your contributions at any time. The City of Houston Deferred Compensation plan allows voluntary contributions. You are able to increase, decrease, stop and restart your contributions at any time.

5. Can I take my money out when I want to?

The IRS requires that you meet certain distributable events to withdraw your accumulated contributions. Retirement or attainment of age 72, severance of employment, unforeseen emergency, or in the event of your death. The purpose of this account is to help you save for retirement.

6. May I take a loan from my account?

The plan allows you to borrow 50% of your balance up to \$50,000. The minimum loan amount is \$1,000. Loan repayments are deducted from your payroll in addition to your voluntary contributions.

7. How do I roll over a 401k from a previous employer?

You need our incoming rollover form and to contact the current provider to release the funds.

Wellness

Who is eligible to earn the discount?

Active employees and their covered spouses as well as Retirees Under 65 are eligible for the incentives.

How do I earn the discount?

Earning the discount is easy. Employees, covered Spouses and Retirees Under 65 should complete the following three steps:

1. Annual Physical or OB/GYN Exam (February 1, 2019 - January 31, 2020)
2. Health Assessment on MyCigna.com (May 1, 2020 - March 12, 2020)
3. Complete one of five wellness engagement options by the corresponding due date.

Remember that each member must complete the health assessment on their own MyCigna.com account. Employees should not attempt to complete their covered spouses health assessment on their personal (employee) account.

What is the maximum discount that I can earn?

Employees in the employee only or employee + children tier can earn a \$600 annual medical rate discount. Employees earn an additional \$300 discount if their covered spouse completes the health assessment and one wellness option. Employees in the employee + spouse or employee + family tier can earn up to a \$900 annual medical rate discount. Retirees Under 65 will also earn a discount; the discount amount will be announced in 2021.

What else can I earn by completing the Wellness Program?

Completing program steps early earns you extra rewards! Check out our Early Bird Rewards Program on page ?? of this booklet or visit our website for more details.

If I don't take the online health assessment, can I still participate in the Wellness program and earn my discount?

No. The online health assessment is a prerequisite to Wellness participation. If you do not complete the health assessment by March 12, 2021, you are not eligible to earn a medical rate discount.

I just started working at the City of Houston. Am I required to take the health assessment?

Employees with benefits effective on or after September 1, 2020 are exempt from taking the online health assessment and will be eligible for the annual discounted rates automatically.

Why do some of the dates go back before the program officially started?

We want to reward you for your proactive wellness activities, like getting your annual exam, so we've included dates that go back to February 1, 2020, for preventive care and healthy lab values and March 16, 2020, for health coaching.

Why do Option A and Option D have a different ending date?

Preventive care activities and Healthy Lab Values take longer to report, so those activities need to be completed by January 31, 2021, to be included.

How do I find out about dates for Onsite Health Education Programs?

Look for announcements for dates of the seminars and health programs coming to a location near you. All dates will be posted on our Wellness Events Page on our website. You can also email us at wconnection@houston.tx.gov to inquire about programs at a specific location.

How do I know when I have completed the requirements to earn a discount?

To confirm that you have completed all requirements, you will need to login to MyCigna.com and view your Wellness Incentives page. For further instructions on how to view this page and check your progress, visit our MyCigna.com Navigation Guide on our website (short link?).

Who is exempt from participation in wellness program?

Employees on FMLA for 2 or more months between May 1, 2020 – March 16, 2021

Employees out on Workers' Compensation for 2 or more months between May 1, 2020 – March 16, 2021

Employees out on Military Leave for 2 or more months between May 1, 2020 – March 16, 2021

Employees on Phase Down

Spouses who are identified as being pregnant (Information provided by Cigna)

Employees whose medical benefits begin on or after September 1, 2020

I still have questions; who do I need to contact?

For questions about the overall Wellness Program, contact Wellness at 832-393-6000, or send an email to wconnection@houstontx.gov. For questions about the health assessment, contact Cigna at 800-284-8346.

Do we get time off to go to our annual exams?

You receive one wellness day per benefit year, September 1 – August 31, to get your exams.

Safe Practices in the Workplace

1. Is the City committed to safety?

Yes, the City is committed to safety from the mayor down. The Zero Is Possible Program is backed by the mayor and all the directors of all the departments.

2. Is there a link where I can find more information on safety policies and safety information?

Please follow this link to the City of Houston's Safety page.

https://www.houstontx.gov/hr/risk_mgmt/safety.html

3. What policies are most useful to read?

Click onto the link above and read the policies there, especially AP 2-2 Motor Vehicle Assignment and Use and AP 2-21 Employee Safety and Health and AP 2-14 Hazard Communication Program.

4. What causes accidents and injuries?

An accident or injury is caused 90% of the time by unsafe acts and 10% of the time by unsafe conditions. People cause unsafe acts such as ignoring safe rules, etc. Unsafe conditions are situations such as floods, hurricanes etc.

5. What kinds of hazards are present when working for the City of Houston?

There are several categories:

- Safety Hazards
- Chemical Hazards
- Ergonomic Hazards
- Physical Hazards
- Biological Hazards
- Work Organization Hazards

6. What are differences between accidents, incidents and Near Misses?

Accident is any event that **generates a medical or indemnity cost** regardless of the compensability of the claim to include Motor Vehicle Crash. **Property damage** may also be considered as a result of an accident.

Incident is any event that occurs that **results** in an injury, exposure or illness, regardless of the severity, or damage to property or equipment.

Near Miss is any unplanned event that **did not result** in injury, illness, or damage, **but had the potential to do so** given a different set of circumstances. Only a fortunate break in the chain of events prevented an injury, fatality or damage; in other words, a miss that was nonetheless, very near.

7. Are weather extremes a concern for field workers at the City of Houston?

Yes, extreme heat and cold are two concerns for workers in the field. It is important to be knowledgeable to recognize signs of distress and how to address them.

8. What is a HAZCOM Policy?

Haz-Com is about informing you of chemicals in the workplace. It trains you on how to work with them, read labels and understand the risks and how to mitigate the risks.

9. What is the Globally Harmonized System?

This is an international system for working with chemicals and labeling them.

10. PASS is a keyword to help you remember the proper procedure for extinguishing a fire. What does the acronym stand for?

PASS stands for the following:

- **P** = pull the pin
- **A** = aim the nozzle
- **S** = squeeze the handle
- **S** = sweep from side to side

11. Is Defensive Driving required?

If you drive a city vehicle or drive on city business, you must take Defensive Driving.

Benefits

1. How long after I enroll in benefits will they be live?

Your benefits become effective 30 days from hire. Either on the 1st or the 16th.

2. What's the sign-up process entail?

You will need to log onto the Employee Self Service (ESS) portal to make your benefits selections.

3. If I decide not to enroll in a benefit plan at this time, when will I be able to do so?

You will need to enroll during the Open Enrollment time frame.

Employee Rights and Responsibilities

1. Time off –

- a. Floating Holiday – hired before June 30 of current year, receive a Floating Holiday to use within the calendar year. Hired after June 30 of current year, Floating Holiday will be available in the next calendar year. It resets every January 1.
- b. Vacation – Permanent, full-time employees accrue each pay period. Not able to be used until after 6 months of employment. Carries over year to year. See the chart below.

Years of completed service	Vacation hours earned per year
Year 1-4	80
Year 5	120
Year 6 and 7	128
Year 8 and 9	136
Year 10 and 11	144
Year 12	152
Year 13	160
Year 14	168
Year 15	176
Year 16	184
Year 17	192
Year 18+	20

- c. Sick Leave – Begins immediately for all new employees. Accrue 2.5 hours per pay period up to 65 per benefit year (September 1 – August 31). City will match unused hours up to 1040 hours. Carries over year to year.
- d. Personal Leave – Rewarded for not using sick time. Does not carry over. Benefit year (Sept 1 - Aug 31). 0 sick time used = 3 personal days. 1 hr sick time - 8 hours sick time used = 2 personal days. 8+ hr sick time - 16 hours sick time = 1 personal day. If you use more than 16 hours of sick time, you receive 0 personal days.
- e. Wellness Leave - 8 hours each benefit year for physical exams and other preventive medical care. Does not carry over.

2. How long is your probationary period?
1 year after hire, 6 months upon transfer or promotion.

Sec. 14-122. - Duration.



- (a) Each appointment to a position in the civil service shall be for a probationary period of 12 consecutive months. Each employee so appointed shall complete the 12 months probationary period, which is to be regarded as a working evaluation period, before being considered a civil service employee.
- (b) Each promotion in the civil service shall require an additional probationary period of six months, which is also to be regarded as a working evaluation period.

3. Within your probationary period, are you allowed to apply for another city job or a promotional job?
Yes, unless the posting specifically excludes probationary employees. If selected; however, the probationary period will begin anew

Sec. 14-124. - Effect of nonpaid absences or transfers during probation.



- (a) If an employee is absent without pay for any reason from his work for a period of over 30 calendar days, during the probationary period, the time he is absent shall not count as a part of the period of probation and the employee will be required to serve that additional time as part of his probationary period.
- (b) If an employee is transferred during the period of probation from a position in one department to a position in another department, the employee so transferred shall be required to start a new probationary period at the time of his transfer.

4. Where do I find the policies?

Find them here: <https://www.houstontx.gov/policies/>

5. Do exempt employees earn comp time?

No.

Sec. 14-168. - Attendance; workweek; overtime compensation, etc.



(a) *Definitions.* Unless otherwise indicated, the following words shall, for purposes of this section, have the following meanings:

Compensatory time or compensatory time off. Hours during which eligible employees are not working but which are counted as hours worked during the applicable workweek for purposes of overtime compensation and for which the employee is compensated at the employee's regular rate of pay.

Eligible employee. All employees of the City of Houston other than **exempt** and noncovered employees as defined in this subsection and those employees classified pursuant to Chapter 143 of the Texas Local Government Code.

Exempt employees. All employees of the City of Houston who are **exempted** from the overtime compensation requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as amended and the pertinent regulations and opinions interpreting that act and who have been designated as such by the human resources director and the commission.

Employee Assistance Program

1. What is an issue?

An issue is the topic for which you come in to visit EAP about. You get 6 sessions per issue per year.

HOPE

1. Where is the HOPE MCA located?

You may locate it [here](#)

2. How do I join the union?

You can contact Daniel Tucker at dtucker@hopetx.org

3. Can we join at any time?

Yes, you are able to join at any time.

4. How often are fees due?

Dues are based off of whatever your hourly pay rate is. They aren't the same for everyone. There is also a cap on the dues. No one pays more than \$35.00 a month. Dues come out of your paycheck twice a month.

5. Who can join the union? Temporary, part-time, probationary employees?

Anyone with an employee ID number who isn't at executive level status (department directors) may join. Temporary workers can't join as they are not technically city employees.