



Memorandum

TO: All State of Alaska Employees

FROM: Kelly Tshibaka, Commissioner, Department of Administration *K. Tshibaka*

DATE: February 4, 2021

SUBJECT: Operational and Workplace Guidance in Response to COVID-19

On March 11, 2020, Governor Dunleavy issued a declaration of public health disaster emergency in response to the worldwide novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and in anticipation of COVID-19 arriving in Alaska. The anticipatory action makes it easier for the State to purchase supplies, hire temporary staff, and access disaster relief funds for public assistance.

It is our priority to keep employees informed and safe, and to deploy the workforce to curb the spread of COVID-19 in Alaska by implementing practical and effective health measures across the organization. The information below provides State agencies with guidelines on preparing for and responding to issues and questions related to the novel coronavirus. These guidelines will be adjusted as we continue to learn more about the spread and impacts of COVID-19. We have also issued a COVID-19 Leave policy which provides guidance on the application of accrued leave and administrative leave for employees impacted by COVID-19.

Steps to take regarding daily office operations

- Managers and supervisors must ask employees to remain home when they are experiencing fever and cough/shortness of breath until they are fever free for 24 hours.
- Take steps to maximize telework options for as many employees as possible. For employees who do not ordinarily telecommute, ask supervisors to identify tasks employees can do remotely, or provide alternative options for telecommuting, if circumstances later necessitate an expansion of telework.
- Ensure each of your worksites are taking steps to maintain high environmental hygiene standards by cleaning surfaces with EPA-approved environmental disinfectants (e.g., bleach, Lysol, Clorox wipes, hydrogen peroxide, isopropyl alcohol). In particular, routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs. If feasible, provide disposable disinfectant wipes so commonly used surfaces can be wiped down by employees before each use.
- For agencies with regular public interaction, post signs and resources to address non-pharmaceutical interventions and consider further efforts to mitigate exposure, especially for individuals showing symptoms. Click [here](#) to view resources.

Conferences, Meetings and business-related gatherings

- Maintaining social distancing and mask wearing needs to occur during in-person employee meetings and gatherings. There is no limit on group gatherings as long as the attendees can maintain social distancing and wear masks. Other options are to work with staff to develop alternatives, such as teleconferencing or videoconferencing, for conducting these meetings.
- Agencies should critically assess the need for conferences and large gatherings, and whether alternative accommodations can be made to mitigate exposure. If it is determined a conference is essential and cannot be delayed or conducted by other means, refer to local health authority guidance on strategies to mitigate exposure.
- Work with staff to develop alternatives for conducting these meetings to minimize risk, including the use of remote meeting technology.

Direction related to travel

- As per the Chief of Staff's 3/9 memo, State employees are not permitted to travel out of state. Exceptions must be approved at the Governor level.
- Per DHSS advice, even for essential travel, consider using alternatives like videoconferencing, teleconferencing, or having fewer attendees.

How to connect to the office remotely

Attached to this memorandum is a resource for how to remain connected to the office if you are working remotely. It contains guidance on remote access without a Virtual Private Network (VPN), accessing e-mail online, and forwarding your work phone.

Guidance when considering office closure

- While we do not currently have any State office closures, we want to make sure you have guidance should your agency have the need to consider this step. Decisions on office closure are to be made in consultation with DHSS and DOA.
- When determining whether to close an office, several factors will be considered, including:
 - Impact to the mission and public.
 - Risk to employees and public of remaining open.
 - Alternatives to continue effective operations (remote location, telecommuting).
 - Span of impacted area or potential for further contamination.
 - Impact of closure on employees and public.
 - Ability to conduct a partial closure of office.
 - DHSS, CDC, OSHA guidelines.

How should our organization navigate questions on possible exposure

The steps an organization should take when an employee reports a possible exposure to COVID-19 will depend upon the specific circumstances, yet employers are asked to err on the side of caution. When preparing for navigating issues related to exposure, please follow the steps below:

1. Get familiar with existing CDC risk assessment resources. [Here](#) are details on the factors and customary CDC interventions an organization should take. These factors provide detail on considerations employers make during possible interventions.

2. The State of Alaska will make decisions based on CDC guidance and consultation with DHSS and health care providers.
3. Based on the direction in AO 315, the State will implement appropriate action as determined by DHSS in any given scenario. If an employee is directed to stay away from the workplace, employers will take steps to determine if remote work is an option while the employee is away from the office and able to work. If the employee is unable to work remotely, employers will explore leave options for the employee. Agencies should administer leave in accordance with the employee leave provisions of their applicable collective bargaining agreement and/or the COVID-19 Leave policy.

Additional employee resources

In this time of uncertainty, we urge everyone to educate themselves as much as possible because accuracy is of the utmost importance. Unnecessary anxiety only clouds judgment and gets in the way of the practical measures we can all take to protect the wellness of employees.

Below you will find a video update from the State of Alaska Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Anne Zink. Dr. Zink's updates, as well as the DHSS COVID-19 page, and the DOPLR COVID-19 State Employee FAQ page, and the CDC COVID-19 Page. These are excellent sources of accurate, up-to-date, and reliable information you can share with your staff to dispel some of the confusion about the virus.

- State of Alaska COVID-19 Central Resource Page: <http://doa.alaska.gov/dop/directorsOffice/covid19/>
- Update from Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Anne Zink: <https://youtu.be/9O6H4P3u1-w>
- State Epidemiologist, Joe McLaughlin, Answers Questions About Coronavirus: <https://www.alaskapublic.org/2020/03/06/coronavirus-is-spreading-worldwide-and-alaska-officials-are-preparing-for-its-arrival/>
- DHSS COVID-19 Information Page: <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/COVID-19/default.aspx>
- CDC COVID-19 Page: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- State of Alaska Employee FAQs: <http://doa.alaska.gov/dop/directorsOffice/covid19/>

For further help, employees can:

- Call 2-1-1 for non-clinical questions
- Call the Care Line for Crisis Intervention: 1-877-266-HELP
- Contact the Employee Assistance Program: 855-417-2493