

Re-entry Plan for State Employees

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RE-ENTRY PLAN FOR STATE EMPLOYEES

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two months, agencies and their employees have been working to modify operations to continue to meet the needs of the citizens of South Carolina. State government has remained open and critical functions of state government have continued throughout this unprecedented time. The work of state government has never been more important, and we appreciate the work of agency leadership, human resources staff, and state employees to quickly adapt to the changes to operations while remaining focused on serving South Carolinians.

The risks associated with the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) are still present. However, it is time to begin short-term and long-term planning on returning state government back to normal operations. Returning employees to the workplace during and after the COVID-19 pandemic will require an incremental and flexible approach. Due to differences in the mission and operations of each agency, the rate at which employees are returned to the workplace will vary from agency to agency. Advanced planning by agencies and adaptability will be key.

The South Carolina Department of Administration (Admin) has developed three broad phases for returning employees to the workplace. These phases and the guidance on each phase are based on the information available at the time of this memorandum and may need to be altered based on future guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC).

As agencies begin to allow additional employees to return to the workplace, it is critical to the state's public health, as well as its economic health, that we individually and collectively continue to follow guidelines from health officials to minimize the spread of COVID-19. At this time, that means that agencies should continue to allow significant numbers of employees to work-from-home to promote social distancing and avoid congregating in indoor spaces to the maximum extent possible. Specific guidelines on continuing work-from-home arrangements are provided below.

At the onset of each phase of returning employees to the workplace, agencies should communicate clearly to employees which employees will be returning to the workplace, the safety measures being taken to limit the spread of COVID-19 and advise on the appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE). Guidance on the use of PPE at each phase is outlined below but may be adjusted during the process of returning employees to the workplace based on evolving medical guidance on the subject. Throughout the pandemic, hand sanitizer and cleaning solutions should be made available at employee worksites at no cost to employees. Admin is working on procuring PPE and cleaning supplies and will provide additional information once it is available. Items Admin is working to procure include the following: cloth face masks, hand sanitizer, cleaning wipes/materials, disposable gloves, plexiglass barriers, hand soap and paper towels.

Additionally, agencies should consistently and regularly remind employees who are sick or have symptoms of COVID-19 to stay home and not report to work until symptoms resolve. At the time of

publication of this memorandum, according to DHEC, symptoms of COVID-19 include shortness of breath, coughing, fever of 100.4 °F or greater, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, and/or new loss of taste or smell. Negative COVID-19 testing is not recommended or required for people to return to workplace. Even workers who were confirmed to have COVID-19 do not have to have negative testing to return to workplace. Instead, DHEC recommends that employees not come to the workplace until 10 days have passed since their symptoms began AND they are free of fever (100.4° F [38° C] or greater using an oral thermometer) for three days without the use of fever-reducing medicines AND their other symptoms have improved.

Agencies should closely monitor COVID-19 guidance from DHEC by visiting the agency's website: scdhec.gov/covid19. Admin will also provide information and answers to frequently asked questions related to returning the workplace. Agencies should continue to monitor Admin's website on COVID-19 for new information: <https://www.admin.sc.gov/COVID19>

PHASE 1

Phase 1 will commence at a date to be announced by the Department of Administration. The commencement of the phase is conditioned on the procurement of personal protective equipment (PPE) by Admin, but will be no later than June 1, 2020. During this phase, agencies are to return employees to the workplace who cannot readily continue to work-from-home and are necessary to support ongoing critical government operations. All employees who can perform their job duties by working from home, with modifications and flexibility, should continue to do so to the maximum extent possible to promote social distancing.

- **Staffing During Phase 1:** Each agency has discretion to determine which employees cannot readily continue to work-from-home, however, generally agencies should only return those employees necessary to support critical government operations to the workplace. Agency operations should not be returned to normal functioning during this phase and should focus instead on critical state government operations.
 - Agencies are strongly encouraged to be judicious in the number of employees returned to the workplace during this first phase to minimize the likelihood of disease transmission in the workplace and the community. Only those employees who cannot readily complete their job duties while working from home should be returned to the workplace.
 - Employees who can productively work from home, with modifications to allow for balancing child care responsibilities and other unique challenges relative to the pandemic, should be allowed to continue to do so. This means that for some agencies and divisions/departments within agencies, few or no employees may be returned to the workplace at this time.
 - Even for staff returned to workplace because they cannot readily continue to perform their job duties from home, staggered staffing and/or alternative work schedules are recommended to the extent possible to limit the number of employees present in an indoor environment at one time. Agencies should consider staggering the start and stop times of employees' shifts or adjusting entry points into the workplace to minimize congregation.
- **Training:** Before returning employees to the workplace, agencies are encouraged to provide training to their employees on public health guidance, agency specific guidelines, and information about properly donning/doffing PPE and cleaning and disinfection. To the extent possible, the training should allow employees an opportunity to ask questions.
- **Signage:** Agencies are also encouraged to display signage throughout the workplace reminding employees of guidance from the CDC and DHEC on entering the workplace. A sample of signage prepared by DHEC and the South Carolina Emergency Management Division can be found at the following link: <https://admin.sc.gov/sites/default/files/CR-012550%201%202%202%202.pdf>

- **PPE During Phase 1:** Employees returned to the workplace during this phase because they cannot readily continue their job duties while working from home should be provided with PPE to the maximum extent possible. All employees who are expected to report to the workplace during this phase are strongly encouraged to wear cloth face coverings anytime when they cannot maintain a minimum of 6 feet from other people. Admin is procuring cloth face masks for agencies to provide to employees who do not have their own to use.
- **Follow Public Health Guidance:** Employees who return to the workplace during Phase 1 should follow the advice of public health officials including:
 - Stay home when sick or if you have been instructed by a health professional to quarantine due to close contact with someone with COVID-19.
 - Stay at least 6 feet apart and wear a cloth face covering when that is not possible.
 - Frequently wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol.
 - Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces (door handles, phones, keyboards, desktops, etc.). Wherever possible, remove high touch surfaces such as trashcan lids.
 - Regularly wipe down shared equipment including copies, fax machines, and common workspaces before and after use. Avoid congregating in common areas such as break rooms and conference rooms. Agencies should consider closing or blocking access to common areas such as conference rooms to discourage gathering.
 - Conduct meetings through conference calls or other remote means even while employees are in the office to maintain social distancing.
 - Increase ventilation air exchanges and percent outdoor air where possible.
- **Workplace Modifications to Promote Social Distancing:** Before returning employees to the workplace, agencies should evaluate whether workplace modifications may be appropriate to maintain social distancing. For example, agencies should consider implementing one-way flow of movement through offices where doing so is feasible. Agencies should also consider posting signage limiting the number of individuals in elevators and stairwells at one time.
- **Vehicle Travel:** If employees must travel in vehicles to perform their job duties, agencies should limit the number of employees in a vehicle to the maximum extent possible and whenever possible only have one employee in a vehicle at one time. If the job duties of an employee require traveling with a crew in a vehicle, agencies should instruct vehicle occupants to wear face coverings, use hand sanitizer and allow for the circulation of outside air.
- **Temperature Taking and Screening:** The federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has advised that taking employee temperatures during the COVID-19 pandemic is lawful. However, DHEC has advised that individuals can be contagious without running a fever and, therefore, urges caution in relying on a fever as the primary disease mitigation

tactic. Agencies should carefully consider social distancing, confidentiality and consistency before implementing a temperature taking procedure if the agency does not have medical staff and are encouraged to consult with their DSHR HR Consultant before implementing a temperature taking process. Admin will also make available sample medical screening, including self-check assessments that can be used in the workplace.

- **Non-Essential Travel:** Agencies should continue to prohibit non-essential travel and require all travel to be approved by leadership.
- **Employees in Vulnerable Populations:** If an employee who cannot readily perform their work from home and supports critical government operations, indicates he or she is within a high-risk or special population (e.g., pregnant) or does not have child care due to school/child care centers, agencies should engage in a one-on-one conversation with the employee to evaluate the appropriate time and manner for the employee to return to the workplace. Agencies are strongly encouraged to continue to maximize work-from-home opportunities for employees in high-risk and special populations, as well as those impacted by school closures.
- **Interactions with the Public:** Agencies should continue to limit face-to-face interaction with the public to the extent possible while still maintaining critical government operations and establish minimum protective guidelines where face-to-face interaction is required. For example, it is strongly recommended that:
 - Both the employee and member of the public should be encouraged to wear cloth face coverings throughout the interaction.
 - To the extent possible, agencies should identify one area within the office where all face-to-face meetings with members of the public will be conducted.
 - Areas where face-to-face meetings are being held should have clear social distancing markings and agencies should consider adding a sneeze guard or similar barrier between the employee and member of the public.
 - Agencies are strongly encouraged to only see members of the public by appointment and not accept walk-ins during Phase 1. A member of the public should be instructed to call a designated number upon arrival for the meeting.
 - Areas where face-to-face meetings are held should be wiped down with disinfecting solutions or wipes after each meeting is concluded and before another meeting is held. Areas should be thoroughly cleaned each evening.
 - Office restrooms should be closed to the public.
 - Agencies should make plans to sanitize and disinfect writing utensils and other items such as clipboards used by the public.
- **Employee Exposure Protocols:** If an employee who has returned to the workplace contracts COVID-19, the agency should notify fellow employees using the exposure communications prepared by Admin and found at the following link:
<https://www.admin.sc.gov/sites/default/files/Employee%20Exposure%20Notice.pdf>

- Agencies should identify a point of contact to answer employee questions regarding exposure and it is strongly encouraged the point of contact be either a health care professional, if one is employed by the agency, or a member of human resources. Communications regarding exposure should not be initiated or directed by front line supervisors and agencies must adhere to confidentiality requirements.
- Employees exposed to a co-worker with confirmed COVID-19 should monitor themselves for symptoms and may be recommended for a 14-day quarantine based on the DHEC Epidemiology team's risk assessment. If possible, the area where the infected individual worked should be isolated for 24 hours and then cleaned and disinfected. If it is not possible to delay access to the area, the workers who perform cleaning/disinfecting should wear appropriate PPE for protection against the cleaning materials and the virus. Refer to CDC Cleaning and Disinfecting Guidelines for additional information found at: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html

If an employee has a member of their household who tests positive for COVID-19, the employee should notify their human resources department before reporting to the workplace to allow the agency time to develop a plan before the employee coming to the workplace. If the household member tests positive for COVID-19 after the employee is back in the workplace, the employee should not return to workplace until they have discussed with the DHEC Epidemiology team whether they need to quarantine for 14 days.

PHASE 2

Phase 2 will commence based on the advice and guidance of DHEC, but at a minimum of two weeks following the start of Phase 1. During Phase 2, agencies should resume normal operations to the extent possible while adhering to social distancing recommendations. Agencies will be expected to stagger employees' return to workplace schedules to promote social distancing and work-from-home is still encouraged to limit disease transmission. Admin will announce the start of Phase 2 after consultation with DHEC.

- **Staffing During Phase 2:** During this phase, agencies should return to normal business operations to the extent possible while still adhering to social distancing guidelines. As a result of social distancing guidelines, agencies may need to rely on staggered schedules or rotating teams of employees into the workplace on different days to promote social distancing.
 - The number of employees that can be returned to the workplace during this phase will vary greatly between agencies and even within agencies. For example, agencies that have employees that predominantly work outside or in remote locations may be able to return a significant amount of those employees to the workplace while still practicing social distancing during this phase. By contrast, agencies with employees assigned to cubicles or other arrangements where workspaces are close together in an indoor space, will be expected to use staggered shifts or team scheduling to keep the percentage of employees in the office at one time low enough to practice social distancing.
 - During Phase 2, agencies may continue to allow employees who's in-office presence is not required to support normal operations to work-from-home to decrease the amount of individuals present in the workplace. Additionally, agencies should allow employees who work in close proximity to other employees in an indoor environment to work-from-home some days of the week to allow for social distancing. For example, an agency that employs 60 individuals in a cubicle environment may decide to assign 20 per day to be physically present in the office to allow more space between work stations and should require the remaining employees to continue to work-from-home on days they are not assigned to report to the workplace.
- **Screening:** As during Phase 1, employees who are directed to return to the workplace full or part-time in Phase 2 should be regularly reminded to not report to the workplace if sick and/or experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. Agencies are encouraged to continue use of any screening protocols developed in Phase 1 during Phase 2.
- **Public Health Guidance and Workplace Modifications** During Phase 2, employees should continue to be directed to follow all public health guidance outlined in Phase 1 including social distancing, regular handwashing, cleaning high contact surfaces, etc. All workplace modifications, display signage, and practices related to PPE and cleaning that were implemented in Phase 1 should be continued in Phase 2.

- **Non-Essential Travel:** Agencies should continue to limit non-essential travel to the maximum extent possible.
- **Cloth Face Coverings:** Employees returned to the workplace during this phase are strongly encouraged to wear cloth face coverings anytime when they cannot maintain a minimum of 6 feet from other people.
- **Employees in Vulnerable Populations:** If an employee who is asked to return to the workplace, full or part-time during Phase 2, indicates he or she is within a high-risk or special population (e.g., pregnant) or does not have child care due to school/child care centers, agencies should engage in a one-on-one conversation with the employee to evaluate the appropriate time and manner for the employee to return to the workplace. Some employees may request a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act to not return to workplace due to an underlying condition which makes them more vulnerable to COVID-19 or a mental health condition exacerbated by COVID-19. The agency's human resources department and management should treat the request in the same manner as any other request for accommodation.
- **Employees Impacted by Child care Availability:** If child care availability is limited and/or schools are still closed during all or part of Phase 2, agencies are encouraged to provide scheduling flexibility and other accommodations to allow parents of children that require care to balance work and child care obligations.
- **Conducting Meetings:** During Phase 2, agencies should still conduct internal meetings through telephone or video conferencing to the maximum extent possible to promote social distancing. In person internal meetings only resume to the extent that social distancing is possible, and PPE is available.
- **Interactions with the Public:** Agencies may resume face-to-face interactions with the public necessary in normal operations but should rigorously manage those interactions to promote social distancing and reduce opportunities for transmission of the disease. For example, it is strongly recommended that:
 - Both the employee and member of the public should be encouraged to wear cloth face coverings throughout the interaction.
 - To the extent possible, agencies identify one area within the office where all face-to-face meetings with members of the public will be conducted.
 - Areas where face-to-face meetings are being held should have clear social distancing markings and agencies should consider adding a sneeze guard or similar barrier between the employee and member of the public.
 - Areas where face-to-face meetings are held should be wiped down with disinfecting solutions or wipes after each meeting is concluded and before another meeting is held. Areas should also be thoroughly cleaned each evening.

- **Employee Exposure Protocols:** All processes and procedures for handling a positive case in the workplace that were established during Phase 1 should continue during Phase 2.

PHASE 3

Phase 3 will commence based on the advice and guidance of DHEC, but at a minimum of two weeks following the start of Phase 2. During this phase, agencies will return to normal operations. All employees should be returned to the workplace except for those who have been identified as appropriate for working from home permanently and those allowed to work from home as a temporary accommodation.

- The ability of state government to move to Phase 3 is contingent on the advice of health professionals, the reopening of schools and the widespread availability of child care options.
- During Phase 3, it is expected that only those employees that were already working from home before the COVID-19 health emergency or those identified as being appropriate to remain on work-from-home status permanently due to the nature of their job duties and related cost savings will continue telework. All other employees will be returned to the workplace full-time unless an accommodation is granted on a case-by-case basis.
- Recommendations regarding the use of PPE in the workplace during Phase 3 will be made at that time in consultation with DHEC.
- Agencies should continue to regularly direct employees to not report to the workplace if they are sick or otherwise exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Thank you for your work adjusting to an ever-changing landscape. Please note this guidance is by no means all-inclusive of considerations agencies will need to make, and Admin will continue to provide information over the next several weeks to assist you in making return to the workplace decisions. We also plan to hold conference calls with both Agency Directors and HR Directors to answer questions.

In the interim, if you have any questions regarding returning employees to the workplace, please contact your HR Consultant (803-896-5300) or Karen Wingo (803-422-8645).