
From: All Hands
Sent: Sunday, March 15, 2020 10:32 PM
To: Broadcast, DOC
Subject: All Hands: Coronavirus Update (3-16-20)

Dear Commerce Team:

Please find below a follow-up to Friday's broadcast email with an update and further guidance on our response to COVID-19. We are proud of the resilience and commitment to Commerce's mission that our employees continue to show during this rapidly evolving situation. More and more examples of community spread of COVID-19 have been detected around the country and many schools and facilities have closed their doors to help slow the spread of the virus. To protect the health and safety of our employees as they serve the public during this time, we are implementing additional Department-wide flexibilities that are described below.

Telework

Consistent with new guidance from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), effective at 12:01 am ET March 16, 2020 **all telework-eligible employees across the Department should begin teleworking to the extent possible until further notice**. Leadership will assess the timing continually and inform you of any changes. Please coordinate with your supervisor if you are telework-eligible and telework-ready.

Employees who are telework-eligible, but not telework-ready, should come in on Monday to gather necessary equipment and materials. Supervisors also should identify opportunities to shift staff who are not currently telework-eligible over to telework-eligible status. By taking these social distancing measures, we reduce risk for our families, ourselves, and our communities, and ensure our operations can continue.

Many of you will need to remain on site to continue to support weather forecasting, laboratory sciences, and other vital functions that cannot be performed remotely. And some of you may be able to work from home several days a week, but not every day, due to responsibilities in the lab or office. Supervisors and employees should work together to maximize telework flexibilities to the extent possible.

We are making every effort to ensure our IT infrastructure is ready to support a large volume of telework employees. That said, please be patient as we work through IT issues that are bound to arise with this shift in the way we go about our business. If you are experiencing issues, work with your local or Bureau IT Support.

Additional Flexibilities

The closing of local schools will present particular challenges for those of you with children at home. Many of you will not be able to work your normal schedule. We moved earlier this week to adjust our existing telework policy in response. Telework-eligible employees may telework with children and/or elders or other dependents at their approved alternate work location. However, employees who are teleworking with dependents at home must account for work and non-work hours and take appropriate leave to account for time spent away from normal work-related duties due to dependent care. Supervisors may also allow staff to temporarily use different work schedules that allow for greater flexibility about their work hours.

Employees should work with their supervisors about their specific circumstances. Supervisors may turn to their servicing human resources offices for support in maximizing flexibilities for all employees.

Travel

As an update to previous travel guidance, going forward, all travel must be mission-critical and pre-approved by senior bureau leadership until further notice. Any Commerce employee who is currently on travel should immediately connect with their supervisor and make plans to return to their duty-station as quickly as possible.

Access to Facilities, Visitors, Deliveries, and Shipments

To support social distancing efforts, beginning immediately, all non-essential visits, deliveries, or shipments to Commerce and Bureau controlled facilities or activities are to be suspended or postponed until further notice. Commerce employees and contractors issued Federal Personal Identity Verification (PIV or CAC) credentials or local facility access control badges still have access to our facilities as long they are not in a period of quarantine. Please work with your supervisor on any mission-essential visitors, deliveries, or shipments, which must be all be approved by senior Commerce or Bureau leadership prior to allowing access. All visits must be sponsored, pre-announced, and occur no less than 72 hours prior to the scheduled access.

High-Risk Staff

We recognize that there may be staff who are not telework eligible but are at higher risk for serious complications from COVID-19. Vulnerable populations include older adults and individuals who have chronic health conditions, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, lung disease, or compromised immune systems. At this time, individuals who are at high risk need to take additional measures to protect themselves. Administrative leave in the form of “weather and safety leave” may be granted for a “condition that prevents the employee or group of employees from safely traveling to or performing work at an approved location.” Because COVID-19 prevents employees who are at higher risk from safely traveling to or performing work at an approved location, supervisors are encouraged to grant weather and safety leave for these employees who are not telework eligible. Please work with your supervisor if you fall in this category.

Health and Safety

Please continue to follow the CDC guidance about COVID-19 to prevent illness and recognize symptoms. If you are sick, stay home, or go home immediately if you are at work, and call your healthcare provider for medical advice. As soon as you’re able, contact your supervisor.

Dealing with Stress

We know that this outbreak may be stressful to you. It may be difficult to cope with the fear and anxiety about a disease, particularly when there is uncertainty. We hope that the decision to move to telework where possible will ease some of the stress. Please visit the CDC Coronavirus webpage, which includes information and resources to cope with this stress and ensure your mental health. In addition, you may reach out to your servicing human resources office for information about your bureau’s Employee Assistance Program.

We will be communicating with you frequently as this situation evolves. Among other things, we are working to compile useful information for you on the internal Commerce webpage, and many of your bureaus already have pages. We will also continue to send broadcast messages like this as circumstances change.

Thank you again, for your work on behalf of the Department of Commerce and the American people. Your efforts are central to the strength that will enable us to weather this trying time and to maintain the nation's prosperity.

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