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TO: Directors and Agency Heads

CC: Agency Human Resource Contacts

FROM: Susan E. Buxton
DHR Administrator

SUBJECT: Workforce Guidance Regarding 2019 Novel Coronavirus

Idaho public health officials are monitoring the rapidly changing 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) situation, on both domestic and international levels. Our goal is to reduce transmission among the state workforce, protect individuals who are at higher risk for adverse health complications, maintain agency operations, and minimize adverse effects on the State of Idaho.

At this time, no confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been identified in Idaho. To monitor the current status of coronavirus in Idaho, please visit: www.coronavirus.idaho.gov.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that for the general public, the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is low. In addition, most COVID-19 illnesses are mild. However, older adults and those with chronic health conditions are at higher risk of more severe illness. (www.CDC.gov/coronavirus).

While the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is currently low, we want to make sure our workforce is following recommended measures to prevent contracting and/or spreading COVID-19 and other communicable diseases. This is a time for us to plan and prepare.

We understand that this is a rapidly evolving situation and that new information will come over the next several weeks. Updates will be made as warranted.

Recommendations to prevent contracting/spreading communicable diseases:

- Regularly practice the same steps you would if you had influenza or another communicable disease, such as:
  - washing your hands thoroughly and often,
  - covering your cough and sneezes,
  - staying home if you are sick, and
  - regularly disinfecting surfaces (especially in common areas).
• Continue your current workplace practices and continue to report to work as usual. Should you become ill, follow your normal call-in procedure.

• Remind employees of telehealth options to reduce visits to their doctor’s office (visit www.ogi.idaho.gov for more information) if they do not need to be seen in-person.

• If you have a respiratory illness and are going to see your medical provider, call ahead to let them know so that you reduce the risk of spreading illness to others in waiting rooms.

Additional recommendations specifically related to COVID-19:
• Do not require employees to provide documentation from their medical provider prior to allowing them to take leave related to COVID-19 and respiratory illness at this time to avoid unnecessary stress on healthcare staff.
• Explore options with agency leadership and DHR to allow employees who are at increased risk of COVID-19, and who public health recommends to self-isolate, to work from home.
• Consult with DHR to determine if it is appropriate to provide paid administrative leave to employees.

Ensuring compliance with employment laws:
• Maintain privacy regarding medical conditions of employees (potential or actual).
• Do not treat employees differently because of their national origin or race (along with other protected categories).
• Ensure your workforce is healthy by notifying employees of potential exposure without identifying the specific employee.
• Consult DHR and your agency’s human resource professionals with questions or concerns.

For persons not at increased risk of COVID-19, the policy remains that employees are only able to use sick leave when deemed medically necessary.

To assist with answering specific employee questions, DHR has added this information along with a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document on our website.

Additional Information: The 2-1-1 CareLine is available to field coronavirus questions by dialing 2-1-1 or 1-800-926-2588. Southwest District Health Department has established a hotline for coronavirus, (208) 455-5411, or call your local public health district Monday-Friday 8 a.m. – 8 p.m. Mountain Time.
What is novel coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some of which cause illness in people and some that are found in animals that can spread to humans. The novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 has not been seen in people before, so it is called new (novel). There are other known human coronaviruses that cause mild respiratory illnesses like the common cold, which more frequently occur in fall and winter.

Coronaviruses are thought to spread from person to person, similar to other respiratory viruses such as through coughing, sneezing or talking. They might also be spread by touching a contaminated surface then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

Idaho public health officials are monitoring the situation very closely and working with federal, state, and local partners. They are prepared to respond if someone is sick or has been exposed.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updates its website (www.cdc.gov/coronavirus) nearly daily with the latest information. The World Health Organization is also a trusted source of information about COVID-19. For information on COVID-19 in Idaho, see Idaho’s novel coronavirus page, coronavirus.idaho.gov.

Continue your current workplace practices and report to work as usual. Should an employee become ill, they should follow normal call-in procedures.

Where can I go for up-to-date information about coronavirus/COVID-19 in Idaho?

Visit coronavirus.idaho.gov for updates, resources, and guidance for Idaho.

What can I do to protect myself?

The CDC recommends the following everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with the crook of your elbow or a tissue; then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaner spray or wipe.

This information is subject to change at any time without notice.
• Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after using the restroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. (For information about handwashing, see CDC’s Handwashing website. For information specific to healthcare, see CDC’s Hand Hygiene in Healthcare Settings.)
• If traveling, follow the CDC’s guidance for travelers.

I am having flu-like symptoms. What should I do?
You should stay home when you are sick to help prevent the spread of illness to others.

If you need to seek medical care, call ahead to a healthcare provider if you:
• Have been in an affected area with apparent community spread within the past 14 days;
• Are concerned you might have been exposed; or
• Have symptoms of fever or cough.

If an employee feels they do not need to be seen in-person by their doctor for an illness or concern, make sure they are aware of telehealth as an option. Visit ogi.idaho.gov to learn more about telehealth benefits. Using telehealth, when appropriate for your particular concern, can reduce your exposure to others, decrease wait times, and provide access to an additional number of healthcare providers.

All state employees enrolled in the state’s medical plan have access to telehealth through MD Live, as well as enrolled family members. Visit ogi.idaho.gov to learn more about your telehealth options.

Can I wear a facemask at work to help prevent infection from coronavirus?

The CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19.

Per their website, facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of facemasks is also crucial for healthcare workers and people who are taking care of someone in close settings (at home or in a health care facility).

Will my agency provide hand sanitizer, tissues, and cleaning supplies for the office?

Agencies may purchase hand sanitizer, tissues, and other cleaning supplies, such as disinfecting wipes, as needed.

What kinds of environmental precautions should employees take for conference rooms and shared equipment?

Like influenza and the common cold, the CDC states that it may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

The CDC recommends the following everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases which includes cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaner or disinfecting wipes.
What are my telecommuting options if I would like to work from home?

Talk with your supervisor about telecommuting options for you. If you are sick, let your work know and stay home. If you or a family member become ill with COVID-19, follow the advice of public health.

DHR will be reviewing additional recommendations regarding telecommuting and administrative leave in the event of prolonged school closures or other disruptions that may result from COVID-19.

Can I request to work in a position with less interpersonal contact until the concerns with COVID-19 are resolved?

Generally, no. However, if you are an employee with a qualified FMLA condition, please consult with your human resources representative to explore possible accommodations.

I went on a vacation and was isolated by public health officials for two weeks after my planned vacation. What should I do?

Although you are isolated, the expectation is that you contact your agency and notify them of your status and anticipated return to work. In this scenario, you may be able to use sick leave and FMLA, if eligible, or other accrued leave.

Can I impose a self-isolation on myself after traveling abroad?

You should discuss your concerns with DHR and your human resources representative, and they will base their recommendations on advice from public health.

What offices need to be closed due to a COVID-19 outbreak?

Each state agency has a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) that outlines how to deliver essential services during an emergency. Contact your supervisor for your agency’s COOP.

How do I find out if the office I am assigned to work at is closed?

Because we provide critical services to all Idaho citizens, we avoid closing offices whenever possible. However, in the rare event that an office is closed, the first place to check is your agency’s website and with your supervisor.

Does my agency have a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)?

All State of Idaho agencies should have a COOP. Consult with your supervisor to obtain further information on the plan.
What if a co-worker is showing signs of illness and is still coming to work?

At this time, most people in the United States have little immediate risk of exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19 and the risk in Idaho is considered low. Employees should follow normal call-in procedures and stay home anytime they are sick to help prevent the spread of illness to others.

If you are concerned about a co-worker showing signs of illness and still coming to work, talk to your supervisor or HR representative. Nonetheless, employees need to be cautious to ensure that they are not violating their co-worker’s rights, discriminating against them, and/or interfering with their privacy.

Will I be covered under worker’s compensation if I contract COVID-19 from a co-worker?

Anytime you believe you have acquired an illness at work, either you or your supervisor should complete and submit the First Report of Injury. The State Insurance Fund will review your claim and determine whether worker’s compensation applies.

Am I required to help a customer or client who is showing signs of COVID-19 or another communicable disease?

In some circumstances, employees have a right to refuse to perform their work if they believe it is not safe to do so. Employees should discuss their concerns with their supervisor and/or human resources representative.

Additional information is available through the U.S. Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration website. Employees with a qualifying disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act may also have additional options available to them.

I am scheduled to travel for work. Can I choose not to go due to COVID-19?

Check with your supervisor to determine if your travel is necessary. In some circumstances, employees have a right to refuse to perform their work if they believe it is not safe to do so. Additional information is available through the U.S. Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration website.

Where can I go for support related to my stress, anxiety, and fears related to the coronavirus?

The current coronavirus outbreak and constant media coverage can be anxiety-producing. While it is important to stay informed, there are things we can do to manage our mental well-being:

- Avoid speculation and get your information from reputable sources such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization, or the official Idaho Coronavirus Website.
- Manage how you follow the outbreak in the media. If the news is causing you stress or anxiety, reduce your media intake and refer to the reputable information sources listed in the bullet point above.
- Talk about your fears, anxiety, and stress. The Employee Assistance Program provides confidential, short-term counseling services for benefit eligible employees and their

Are there additional resources?

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