



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

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March 11, 2020

To: All Department Heads

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PROACTIVE EMERGENCY PROCEDURES, RESOURCES AND PRACTICES FOR COUNTY DEPARTMENTS IN RESPONSE TO NOVEL CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

The County of Los Angeles (County) has an obligation to provide a safe and healthy environment to its workforce and the public we serve at all our facilities. On March 4, 2020 the Chair of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) declared the existence of a local emergency as a result of the increased transmission of COVID-19 throughout the United States and the identification of 27 confirmed cases within Los Angeles County itself. In response, the Department of Human Resources (DHR) has partnered with the Department of Public Health (DPH) to provide County departments with a proactive pandemic response guide.

PREPAREDNESS RESPONSE OUTLINE

An important priority of the County as an employer is to ensure the safety of our employees, as well as the continuity of County services. To do so, County departments are being asked to prepare for temporary measures in the following areas:

- A. Increase communication regarding workplace wellness and hygiene practices
- B. Be flexible with sick leave requests to encourage employees who are ill to stay at home whenever possible
- C. Develop a strategic telework plan to support employees and maintain operation of key County services despite potential absences
- D. Ensure fair treatment of all individuals in our County work environment

More details on these four key areas are provided below:

A. ENCOURAGE WORKPLACE HYGIENE

DHR is asking for support from departments in enhancing communication to all our employees about the importance of protective hygiene practices in the workplace, as advised by Center for Disease Control (CDC) and global health authorities. This includes:

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- Stay home when sick.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Cover cough or sneeze with your elbow or a tissue, then immediately throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands with soap and water.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

In addition, departments are encouraged to increase focus on the cleanliness and maintenance of their facilities and to implement procedures to support social distancing.

- Ensure that all bathrooms are fully stocked with soap, towels or air-drying units and trash cans, and are easily accessible to staff and the public.
- Ensure routine cleaning of facilities, especially frequently touched surfaces such as doorknobs, countertops and workstations.
- Post signage throughout the building reminding individuals to practice public health hygiene. Materials are available for posting and distributing at <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov>.
- Practice social distancing at workplaces, including minimizing non-essential large meetings or conferences, and modifying workspaces, where possible, to allow for less crowding in waiting areas, common rooms, and at work stations.
- Review client services protocols and practices, and propose modifications where appropriate, to accommodate potential social distancing directives. Consider telephone visits, skype consultations, and modifications of in-person meeting requirements for clients who are ill or under quarantine directives.

B. SICK LEAVE FLEXIBILITY AND DOCUMENTATION

The CDC predicts potential increased spread of COVID-19 in the United States. Therefore, at the recommendation of CDC and public health officials, **DHR is temporarily waiving the requirement outlined in [County Procedure, Policy and Guideline \(PPG\) 531 – Attendance](#)** that departments must obtain a signed medical certification for any employee who is absent more than five consecutive work days. This is aimed to limit the pressure on healthcare provider offices and medical facilities that are currently inundated with clients as a result of this outbreak and to alleviate pressure on employees who are exhibiting signs of transmittable illnesses, but may otherwise not provide themselves adequate time to recover at home. In addition:

- Pay attention to identifying possible work location modifications for employees who have underlying health conditions that put them at increased risk for serious illness.
- Plan for absences of large numbers of employees, either because they are ill or they have been asked to remain home under quarantine restrictions and have strategies for continuing essential services.

Employee Messaging

Departments are asked to reinforce the message that employees should stay at home if they are feeling ill, for the health and safety of themselves and their fellow employees, and to take a lenient stance on requests for increased sick leave usage during this time. CDC guidelines show that [symptoms for COVID-19](#) mirror those of influenza, with fever, coughing, and shortness of breath. Employees should err on the side of caution and stay

at home until they are free of fever and/or productive cough for at least 72 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants).

We have contacted all our medical insurance carriers, and they have confirmed that tele-medicine services are available to all members. Employees are encouraged to use this service as a first option before going to their doctor or urgent care. Board-certified physicians and nurse practitioners staff this service and will help employees decide if they need to be seen in person. Many “tele-doctor” providers also can issue electronic medical notes if needed.

Employee Travel Considerations

As expressed in the Director of Personnel and Director of Public Health’s joint *Coronavirus Update* issued on February 13, 2020, County employees who return from travel anywhere that is designated as an area of high risk in the world, are subject to the directives established by the federal government. Current directives include requesting travelers to ‘socially distance’ themselves by staying away from public spaces for up to 14 days from the last exposure or, in some instances, instigating formal quarantines.

Staff members who have traveled to high risk areas (currently this is China, South Korea, Iran, and Italy) are advised to not return to work for 14 days and to self-monitor for symptoms at home. Staff members who have had exposure to individuals who were diagnosed with COVID-19 are advised to stay home for 14 days from the last day of exposure. Employees confirmed to be infected with COVID-19 *should* obtain a medical release from their healthcare provider before returning to work.

Assessment of Ill or Potentially Ill Employees

Consistent with the County’s stance on influenza, departmental managers are expected to show good judgment when they notice an employee who is exhibiting signs of illness in the workplace. If a manager notices an employee who may be ill at work it is important for them to speak with the employee directly before taking any actions, as the employee’s symptoms may be due to non-contagious conditions, such as asthma or allergies. If it is discovered that the staff member is ill, they should be encouraged to stay home until symptom free for a minimum of 72 hours.

In the rare instances where an employee refuses to leave the workplace while ill, your department can utilize the *Ill-at-Work Evaluation Process*. This process, outlined in the attachment, provides management with the resources needed to help an employee obtain an immediate medical assessment of their symptoms and receive confirmation if they are well enough to return to the workplace or should remain at home to recover.

C. INCREASE ACCESS TO TELEWORK

As the situation evolves, employees may be required to stay home to care for a sick family member or to take care of children who are out of school. As a component of the County’s proactive response to the impact of COVID-19 on our workforce and operations, DHR is encouraging all County departments to facilitate telework as an option for employees who are not able to come to the workplace due to self-monitoring or the need to support family members. To support these efforts, **DHR has temporarily waived the requirements for employees to complete the County Teleworker Training module and to complete a formal telework agreement**, if the department determines they have a justified need to

telework from home (e.g. social distancing or caring for a family member). Please ensure that all employees code their time cards appropriately using the approved telework reason codes.

Although telework is highly promoted as a tool to allow employees to work in emergency situations, it is important to note that telework is not to be used in substitution for sick leave. Employees who are ill should be encouraged to use their leave time to recover and focus on their personal wellness.

We know that a proactive plan is far more effective than reactionary efforts, and encourage all departments and their Human Resources Managers to develop a communications strategy to advance telework as a viable option to their workforce and to work with their line supervisors to determine which positions would be best suited to this temporary arrangement, if needed. DHR will shortly be sending a survey to all Departmental Human Resources Managers to identify the number of employees that currently have access to telework resources, determine which roles are suitable to telework in emergency situations, and develop a timeline for preparing staff for that potential arrangement.

D. COMMIT TO THE FAIR TREATMENT OF ALL

County leadership has the responsibility to ensure a safe and fair working environment within all departments and County workplaces. Since COVID-19 is a new infectious disease and information about its transmission and response are still evolving, employees may be anxious and will look to leadership to set the tone. In order to prevent stigma and ensure equitable treatment of all, determinations about the risk of COVID-19 should not be made based on a specific race or ethnic group, , people who were placed in quarantine, or people with recent travel to countries that have identified outbreaks. DHR has developed the COVID-19 Equity Statement (attached) which we encourage you to share with employees.

Departments are encouraged to share verified information sources with their employees to address concerns and help them remain informed. Both DPH and CDC have information on their websites that can be used to best provide support for employees, clients and the public. This information is regularly being updated:

- DPH: <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus>
- Information on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/summary.html>
- Frequently Asked Questions and Answers
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>
- Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), February 2020
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-business-response.html>

NEXT STEPS

Echoing the Board's leadership, any response to widespread local spread of disease is a constantly evolving situation and the County's action plan will need to adjust as more information on travel risks, transmission routes and healthcare resources becomes available. DHR and DPH are committed to working with our County partners to monitor the situation and continue to ensure the wellbeing of our workforce and their families. Please note that DHR is working with the Departmental Human Resources Managers to ensure they have the necessary and latest information from a workforce perspective. However, should you have questions or want more information about COVID-19, please contact Jacqueline Valenzuela, Chief Advisor to the Health Officer, at (213) 288-8243 or jvalenzuela@ph.lacounty.gov. If you have questions about ill-at-work guidelines or telework practices, contact Maggie Martinez, Assistant Director, at (213) 351-2921.

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Attachments (2)

- c: Board of Supervisors
- Chief Executive Office
- Chief Deputies
- Administrative Deputies
- Departmental Human Resources Managers

ILL-AT-WORK EVALUATION
Updated March 11, 2020

The County of Los Angeles (County) strives to provide a safe and healthy work environment for its employees. As noted in the Chief Executive Office (CEO) memorandums dated October 9, 2009 and January 11, 2010, Department Management is expected to take an active role in preventing the spread of communicable diseases such as the flu in the workplace.

Because only a healthcare professional can diagnose a medical condition, the Ill-at-Work Evaluation was established to assist management in difficult cases by providing a professional assessment of potential illness.

Contagious Illness

The contagious period for a **typical** respiratory illness exists until all symptoms have disappeared for at least 24 hours. Some symptoms that may be easily apparent to management include frequent coughing, flushed skin, red and watery eyes, and/or reported fever. When these cases are suspected, it is important for Department Management to first talk to the employee. The employee should be encouraged to go home and not return to work until they have been symptom-free for at least 24 hours.

Employees should also be instructed to seek care from their personal physician immediately if they experience any of the following symptoms:

- Difficulty breathing for shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Vomiting and diarrhea
- Fever and/or Chills
- Disorientation or confusion

Special Note Related to COVID-19

Symptoms for COVID-19 are similar to symptoms exhibited by the flu and other respiratory illnesses; these symptoms can include fever, coughing, shortness of breath, and severe illness. *Please keep in mind that an individual with a chronic non-contagious condition like asthma, chronic bronchitis, or allergies may exhibit similar symptoms.*

Employees who have these symptoms during this period of COVID-19 prevention/mitigation should remain at home until they have been free of fever and/or productive cough for at least 72 hours, without the use of fever-reducing medicine or cough suppressants.

REFERRAL OF EMPLOYEE FOR ILL-AT-WORK EVALUATION

If an employee declines management's recommendation to go home or be evaluated by a personal medical provider despite exhibiting typical symptoms of a contagious illness, the Department should consider an Ill-at-Work Evaluation to be conducted by one of the

Department of Human Resources (DHR) Occupational Health Program (OHP)-contracted medical clinics. Departments are to contact the selected clinic by phone to obtain the appropriate instructions to provide to the employee for the service referral.

Departments may visit the DHR website at <https://employee.hr.lacounty.gov/flu-assessment/> to obtain:

- Copies of the CEO memos dated October 9, 2009 and January 11, 2010;
- A list of DHR OHP-contracted medical clinics that will conduct Ill-at-Work Evaluations, the clinics' contact information, and the pricing that will be billed to the referring Department (see "*Table of Employee Medical Contractors*"); and
- An Employee Examination Work Order to request the Ill-at-Work Evaluation.

To Initiate the Ill-at-Work Evaluation, Department Management:

1. Call the nearest DHR OHP-contracted medical clinic and inform clinic staff that an employee is being referred to the clinic for an ill-at-work evaluation. Obtain specific instructions from the clinic to provide the employee for the service referral (e.g., should employee go to the clinic or go home and contact the clinic by phone prior to going to the medical facility.)

If there is a concern about COVID-19 symptoms, please be sure to let the clinic know. Clinic staff will let you know whether a phone screening with the employee will be the first step before having an in-person assessment.

2. Fax the completed Employee Examination Work Order, requesting the Ill-at-Work Evaluation, to the clinic.
3. Inform the employee to immediately follow the instructions provided by the clinic to obtain services.

e.g., report directly to the clinic, go home and contact the clinic by phone prior to going to the clinic, etc. The employee may also decide to go home and see their own medical provider.

Conclusion of the Ill-at-Work Evaluation

If the DHR OHP-contracted physician concludes:

1. That the employee is ill and contagious, the employee may be ordered to not return to the work site and be placed off work for the remainder of the day.

For COVID-19, this will be for 72 hours after the resolution of symptoms without the use of fever-reducing medications and/or cough suppressants.

The contract physician will notify the Department that the employee has been placed off-duty. An employee placed off-duty by the clinic does not need to return to the clinic prior to returning to work.

Assuming that at least 24 hours have transpired since being ordered to not return to the work site and being placed off work, Department Management would handle their absence and return as they would for any employee who is returning from a medical leave.

For COVID-19, this will apply when the employee has been symptom-free (e.g. fever, productive cough) for at least 72 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications and/or cough suppressants.

Being directed back to the clinic for a second Ill-at-Work Evaluation would be contingent on repeated observations by Department Management of symptoms consistent with a contagious condition, such as the flu.

2. That the employee is not ill or contagious, the contract physician will notify the Department that the employee is able to return to the workplace.

ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE

Departments with additional questions or needing assistance with the medical evaluation process, may contact DHR OHP Hotline at (213) 738-2187, or Dr. Kenichi Carrigan at (213) 738-2186 or KCarrigan@hr.lacounty.gov.

CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19) EQUITY STATEMENT FROM THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

The County of Los Angeles (County) recognizes the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) was first identified in Wuhan, China and, as of January 30, 2020, was declared a global health emergency by the World Health Organization (WHO). There have been over 100,000 cases of COVID-19 confirmed worldwide. It is important to keep in mind that COVID-19 is not tied to one particular group of individuals, and at this point, has affected many ethnicities, races, and nationalities.

Diseases, such as COVID-19, do not target a specific ethnic or racial group. COVID-19 is a new infectious disease presenting across the world and we recognize that people may be anxious, fearful and worried about the spread of this virus. A lack of knowledge and understanding of COVID-19 and the need to blame someone can lead to social stigma towards a specific group of people based on their nationality or ethnicity, or towards people who were in quarantine.

In order to prevent social stigma towards a specific group of people, employees are encouraged to educate themselves using the available resources from the Department of Public Health (DPH) and CDC websites. Employees are also encouraged to support others by learning and sharing the facts about COVID-19 rather than engaging in gossip, rumors or myths.

As an employer, the County expects its employees to treat others, including co-workers and members of the public, with dignity, respect and professionalism as the County Policy of Equity (CPOE) states. Employee conduct is expected to be in accordance with the CPOE and applicable local, county, state, and federal laws.

EQUITY BEST PRACTICES

The County would like to remind all employees of some equity best practices in the workplace:

- Be sensitive to explicit and implicit biases towards others; for example:
 - Do not make assumptions based on a person's ethnicity, race, and/or nationality;
 - Do not make assumptions that a person has been exposed to COVID-19 based on ethnicity, race, and/or nationality;
 - Do not be fearful of a person because of the person's ethnicity, race, and/or nationality;
- Do not assume a person has COVID-19 because they are wearing a mask;
- Do not assume an employee has COVID-19 because they are sick, on a leave of absence or are working from home;
- Educate yourself by getting the facts about COVID-19 from a reliable source, such as the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health website <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus>; and
- Speak up when you hear false rumors or negative stereotypes that foster biases and potential racism.

COUNTY OPERATIONS

The County is taking active steps to stop the spread of COVID-19 and to protect the health and safety of our employees, their families, and all County constituents. The County will continue to operate under the guidance outlined by DPH, CDC and WHO. Decisions, actions, and plans will be taken for the betterment of all County employees with full consideration of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the CPOE.