



**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES**

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March 11, 2020

To: Supervisor Kathryn Barger, Chair  
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Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas  
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl  
Supervisor Janice Hahn

From: Lisa M. Garrett  
Director of Personnel

**PREPARING FOR EMERGENCIES WITH TELEWORK (ITEM 60A, AGENDA OF MARCH 4, 2020)**

On March 4, 2020 your Board adopted a motion by Supervisor Hahn directing the Director of Personnel, in consultation with the Director of Public Health (DPH), to enhance County telework practices in response to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Specifically, this motion called for the Department of Human Resources (DHR) to work with each County department to develop teleworking procedures consistent with best practices outlined by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in light of potential large-scale absences of the workforce due to employee illnesses, the need to care for family members or the closure of local public schools.

In response to this directive, DHR and DPH have taken immediate action to enhance the telework readiness of the County's workforce. The report below outlines the steps taken to date, recommended next steps, and long-term actions that would minimize the response time for future pandemic outbreaks or other emergency situations.

**COVID-19 Best Practice Summary**

When developing the County's plan to address workplace needs related to COVID-19, DHR relied heavily on best practice information published by public health experts. Both the WHO and the CDC have already posted interim guidance for businesses and employers to plan and respond to COVID-19. These guidelines are primarily focused on preventing workplace exposures to acute respiratory illnesses, specifically COVID-19, in non-healthcare workplaces, as well as providing planning considerations if there are more widespread, community outbreaks of COVID-19. The employer best practices outlined in these guides focus on four key recommendations: (1) maintaining flexible policies that

allow employees to stay home to care for themselves or sick family members; (2) emphasizing workplace hygiene, particularly the need for all employees to regularly wash their hands and sanitize frequently touched spaces; (3) send employees who are exhibiting signs of illness home so they can limit exposure to health individuals and self-monitor symptoms; (4) identify methods to keep essential services operating if the agency experiences increased employee absenteeism.

Both agencies greatly underscore the importance of establishing emergency policies and practices to allow employees to work from home in the event that a pandemic outbreak disrupts normal business practices. In light of these recommendations, several large universities, businesses and organizations, including the California State University System, UCLA, Facebook, and Twitter, have proactively expanded their telework program to help mitigate the spread of the contagion. In addition, as recently as March 8, 2020, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) urged federal agencies to be prepared to offer telework to more employees. By following suit at this early stage of the COVID-19 outbreak, Los Angeles County will position itself as a proactive national leader.

#### **Actions Taken to Date**

DHR and DPH are working collaboratively with our County partners to determine which immediate actions will best support our workforce. On March 9, 2020, DHR convened an emergency meeting with all Departmental Human Resources Managers (DHRMs) to discuss the potential impact of COVID-19 on their departmental processes and unique workforce structures. At this meeting, DHR discussed several actions it has already taken to better prepare the entire County workforce. This includes:

1. Updating the County's *Ill-at-Work Protocol* to provide managers with a tool to assess and support employees who show symptoms of COVID-19 in the workplace.
2. Creating an updated *Equity Statement* to help supervisors and employees address issues resulting from COVID-19 concerns and fears.
3. Meeting with DPH, Chief Executive Office, Chief Information Office (CIO) and County Counsel to explore paid leave options for individuals affected by COVID-19, as well as other unforeseen emergency situations.
4. Waiving the requirement for departments to obtain a signed medical certification for any employee who is absent more than five (5) consecutive work days. Suspension of this requirement not only mirrors WHO and CDC best practices and decreases the burden on employees who are affected by a contagious illness, it also minimizes the demand on already taxed healthcare facilities and providers.
5. DHR has confirmed that "tele-medicine" services are offered by all County medical plan carriers; these services are available 24/7 and are easily accessible by computer, tablet, or mobile phone.

### **Emergency Telework Recommendations**

At the March 9, 2020 meeting, DHR also collaborated with DHRMs on proposed emergency telework practices in response to the continued outbreak. These new temporary measures would suspend the normal teleworker and telemanager requirements outlined in the current Telework Procedures Manual and Board Policy 9.090, in order to allow impacted employees to utilize this tool during the COVID-19 response. The following recommended actions are grounded in recommendations from global public health experts and are intended to apply only during the timeframe that our workforce is impacted by COVID-19.

1. **Suspension of routine telework requirements.** Suspend the requirement for both employees and their supervisors to complete telework training prior to beginning a telework arrangement and waive the requirement for a formal Telework Agreement. Allow for telework to begin immediately once they have received written/email approval.
2. **Maximize the use of technology to minimize person-to-person contact.** Replace in-person meetings with conference calls and conduct interviews via video conference as much as possible.
3. **Introduce “remote work test periods”.** In preparation for larger scale telework deployment, Departments would select employees to work from home in half day or full day intervals to identify any issues with connectivity or productivity. Findings from these “test periods” would assist in the development and implementation of more permanent telework solutions.
4. **Require the inclusion of telework in Continuity of Operations Plans.** In keeping with recent guidance from OPM, each Department would be required to include telework in its Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). The plan would direct departments to identify as many employees as teleworkers as possible, and to take steps to make these employees “telework ready”.

DHR, in collaboration with DPH, has prepared a memo to all Department Heads confirming these emergency practices and encouraging all DHRMs to develop a communications strategy to advance telework as a viable option to their workforce immediately, if operationally feasible.

While not all employees may be able to telework due to the nature of their work assignments, DHR and DPH are actively communicating the need for departments to be flexible in light of this emergency situation. DHR is actively partnering with departments and CIO to identify the number of employees that currently have access to telework resources and determine which staff roles are suitable to telework in emergency situations. DHR has also begun working with DHRMs to identify additional employees that may be provided alternate assignments that lend themselves to telework in case of emergencies.

### **Emergency Telework Protocols and Procedures**

The efforts to expand emergency telework access to County employees as a result of COVID-19 highlight the need for easily activated personnel protocols in case of

emergencies that span beyond the standard Continuity of Operations plan. DHR commits to working with CEO, CIO, and the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to develop standardized emergency telework protocols and procedures that can be implemented in response to any future pandemic or other disaster response, if appropriate. Potential directives to be addressed in this standing protocol include:

1. **Emergency telework protocol activation** – Language that explains how an emergency telework protocol is to be activated, how approvals should be made under its activation, and what communication employees and departments should expect once an emergency protocol for telework has been activated.
2. **Suspension of routine telework requirements** – In the event of an emergency telework protocol activation, the current requirement for both employees and their supervisors to complete telework training prior to beginning of a telework arrangement would be suspended. In addition, language should be included to allow for a grace period for the completion of the required Telework Agreement or a modification that would allow for written approval (i.e. email correspondence) to begin an emergency telework arrangement. Finally, the inclusion of language that would ask supervisors to be flexible while determining telework assignments (e.g. suspending the requirement to submit a daily Telework Task Schedule Form during emergencies or assigning alternate telework appropriate tasks for employees who traditionally would not be able to telework), in order to allow the maximum amount of the workforce to participate in this alternate arrangement. These modifications would be terminated when the emergency is no longer in effect.
3. **Waiver of the requirement for medical certification.** – Suspension of the current requirement found in *Procedure, Policy and Guideline (PPG) 531 – Attendance* for departments to obtain a signed medical certification for any employee who is absent more than five consecutive work days. Suspension of this routine requirement during pandemic outbreaks, when healthcare providers are already experiencing an influx of clients, would mirror WHO and CDC best practices and decrease the burden on employees who are affected by a contagious illness.

DHR and DPH are committed to advancing policies that not only support our employees during the response to COVID-19, but also to any future emergency or pandemic response our communities may weather. Should you have any questions you may contact Lisa Garrett at (213) 974-2406, or Dr. Barbara Ferrer at (213) 288-8117.

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c: Executive Office, Board of Supervisors  
Chief Executive Office  
Office of Emergency Management  
Public Health