



*Commonwealth of Virginia*  
*Office of Governor Ralph S. Northam*

March 13, 2020

MEMORANDUM

To: Agency Heads  
CC: Cabinet Members  
From: Chief of Staff  
Subject: COVID-19 and Agency Preparedness

Thank you for participating on the conference call to learn the steps the Commonwealth of Virginia is taking to respond to the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19). To ensure you received the information covered, below is a recap of the guidance provided.

**Continuity of Operations Plan** – if you have not already, please continue to review your COOP plan. It is critical that you think about essential functions and operations as they relate specifically to the COVID-19 event. This is a health emergency and not a normal, short duration natural disaster.

**Teleworking** – continue to evaluate teleworking as an option for employees. This includes evaluating options for positions that are not normally eligible for teleworking.

- Agency operational needs will determine teleworking capabilities.
- Teleworking is not mandatory; nor, must all employees telework at the same time. Teleworking is a means to reduce the frequency and duration of interpersonal contact that is inherent in the workplace.
- Agencies are encouraged to look for innovative ways to redesign work processes to have non-traditional teleworkers ready and capable to telework should a need arise.
- Some employees have self-disclosed that they are high risk because of age or underlying health conditions. While COVID-19 can be spread to any demographic, teleworking, alternate work locations, and schedule changes that support social distancing are all

possibilities that should be explored with employees as needed including high-risk populations.

- DHRM will be publishing information on teleworking tools and best practices to further assist agencies.

**Technology** – agencies supported by VITA are asked to work with VITA to assess hardware and network needs to further support teleworking capabilities of your workforce. Maintaining security during an event such as this is paramount, as it is an opportune time to receive external attacks. The Customer Account Managers (CAMs) will be working with your agencies to gather the below information.

- What we need from you:
  - Information around how many employees require VPN access in the event we need to commence rationing.
  - How many agency desktops need an alternative option (e.g. laptop, virtual desktop access, etc)?
  - How many agency employees who need to telework do not have an acceptable internet connection at home?
  - Which limited agency employees will require enhanced collaboration and conferencing tools (e.g. WebEx) due to the Google Hangouts participant limitation?
  - As you look at your business processes, we recommend you identify automation and technological optimization opportunities to enhance the sustainability of your business operations in the future. Your assessments should lend itself to longer term strategic and technology plans.

**Mass Gatherings** – all specially-scheduled state conferences and large events are cancelled for a minimum of 30 days.

- Agencies must take action now to postpone or cancel events.
- Agencies must evaluate all work-related gatherings to ensure they are critical and support our focus on emergency operations.
- Agencies are encouraged to reduce face to face meetings by using existing technology and tools available to the workforce. G-Mail, Google hangouts, teleconferencing and other collaborative, social platforms are good alternatives to in-person meetings.

**Office Closings** – please be guided by the following when determining if an office closing is necessary.

- **Operations of government must continue, and our objective is to keep offices open. You are required to close an office or disrupt operations ONLY IF you have a confirmed, positive diagnosis of COVID-19 for an employee, contract worker or visitor.**
- We also acknowledge that each agency has unique and specific circumstances that may require deviation from this objective. You are encouraged to discuss your unique circumstances first with your Cabinet Secretary. If further guidance is needed, the cross-

functional VEST team can advise you, including all aspects of public health and inter-governmental considerations. You and your Secretary should contact [dillon.taylor@vdem.virginia.gov](mailto:dillon.taylor@vdem.virginia.gov) to interact with the VEST.

- Work locations with a confirmed, positive diagnosis can be closed to allow for a thorough cleaning following the environmental hygiene guidelines noted below. Agencies should follow emergency closing protocols for the specific location.
- Employees who are able to telework while the office is closed should do so.
- Other employees who are unable to telework should charge their time as they do for normal emergency office closures.
- Any decision to close an office must be communicated to your Cabinet Secretary prior to employee notifications.
- Employees who demonstrate symptoms of an illness should be asked to leave the office, go home and seek medical treatment if needed. Not every sick employee will have COVID-19.

**Environmental Hygiene** – the Department of General Services has released [guidance](#) to tenants of DGS-operated buildings. Agencies who own their buildings should consider the guidance provided and implement, where appropriate. Agencies in DGS-administered leased space, should take similar preventative measures and may contact DGS if there are any concerns. If your office is in leased space not administered by DGS, you should reach out to your landlord to discuss any concerns.

- DGS will take the following steps in all DGS-owned buildings:
  - Place freestanding, self-dispensing hand sanitizing stations at all approved building entrances, as long as supplies are available
  - Ensure all restroom hand soap is antibacterial
  - Post information in elevators and main-floor restrooms
  - Hold additional training with our custodial staff and contractors
  - Ensure all high-touch areas are cleaned frequently

**Travel** – official state employee travel will not be allowed outside Virginia for the next 30 days starting March 12<sup>th</sup>. All travel should be evaluated carefully to determine if the travel is mission critical and necessary during this period of time.

As I have stated before, our guidance will continue to evolve as needed and there may be more detailed, specific guidance provided by the Virginia Department of Health for unique facilities such as correctional, behavioral health, educational institutions, etc. Please be mindful that as leaders you set the tone for preparedness and response. Take that role seriously, stay informed and communicate with your leadership teams and employees.