



June 15, 2022

DELIVERED BY EMAIL

The Honorable Kiran Ahuja
Director
Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20415

The Honorable Jason Miller
Deputy Director for Management
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th St., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Kiran and Jason:

I am writing to you to oppose the current screening testing program for federal employees and to request that the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force immediately end the program. The current plan simply does not accomplish the goal of halting the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. It reflects outdated policies that are no longer applicable based on current conditions, which have changed since the program was first announced in January 2021.

Recently, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [rescinded](#) the requirement for travelers entering the country to test negative for COVID-19. According to the CDC [statement](#), the CDC changed the policy because the initial requirement for screening testing it adopted early in the pandemic to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is no longer necessary based on subsequent advances. The CDC says in its statement that “since [the beginning of the pandemic] many circumstances have changed, including the widespread uptake of effective COVID-19 vaccines and accompanying vaccine- and infection-induced immunity as well as availability of effective therapeutics.”

These changes in circumstances apply equally to the federal workforce, which has also experienced a high uptake of effective COVID-19 vaccines and infection-induced immunity. Similarly, this warrants a shift in policy as a result of the same changing circumstances that led to a rescission of requirements for travelers entering the United States.

The current screening-testing program being conducted by federal agencies is expensive, time consuming and does little to protect the workforce. Emerging research and experience is showing that antigen rapid tests are [less effective in detecting the new variants](#) and take longer to reveal a positive result. As such, the current screening testing program is not identifying infection in a timely manner and therefore not protecting employees in the workplace.

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Even if the tests were more effective, the current screening testing program only requires the small percentage of employees who are not fully vaccinated to be tested. We know from experience that federal employees who are fully vaccinated continue to contract and spread COVID-19. Thus, the screening testing program for unvaccinated employees does not meet its stated purpose to “identify unknown cases (of COVID-19) so that measures can be taken to prevent further transmission.” This is especially true given the cost of testing and the need to often take people off the frontline to get tested in workplaces where staffing shortages are severe. Funds spent on this insufficient testing program would be better allocated to doing the important work of the federal government. It is time to reevaluate the screening testing program based on the circumstances as they exist today and end this requirement immediately.

Despite the increased spread of COVID-19, most agencies are rushing to bring employees back to the workplace, even though they have demonstrated success performing portable work from a telework location. NTEU is asking the Task Force to reconsider guidance to agencies to help reshape plans designed to return to the office employees who have been successfully teleworking fulltime for the past two-plus years. In the CDC’s updated guidance to travelers, it recommends in place of a screening testing program that travelers make informed choices. I am urging the Task Force to similarly recommend that federal agencies permit federal employees to exercise their judgment and allow them to make informed choices to protect themselves and their families.

We are seeing unnecessary limitations on telework across our agencies; managers requiring employees to attend in-person meetings despite the availability of technology; and denials of exceptions for employees with extenuating circumstances, such as vulnerable family members. Giving employees who can work remotely broad leeway to continue teleworking is perhaps the most effective way to safeguard the workforce. Furthermore, some agencies have been granted exceptions to social distancing policies. When agencies are granted a waiver for social distancing, the only thing they are waiving is the employee’s ability to stay safe.

I appreciate the work the Task Force has done in multiple areas to keep employees safe, but the screening testing policy simply does not fit that mold. I would welcome a further discussion of these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony M. Reardon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'A' and 'R'.

Anthony M. Reardon
National President

cc: Sam Berger, Director for Strategic Operations and Policy, COVID Response Team