

From: For OS announcements to all of HHS
Sent: Monday, March 9, 2020 8:18 PM
Subject: HHS Guidance Email: COVID-19 Update

March 9, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Protecting your health and safety is our foremost concern as we continue to fulfill our critical mission to enhance and protect the health and well-being of all Americans. While the immediate risk of infection with COVID-19 for most Americans remains low, recent events have raised the risk in some communities. The best way to help prevent person-to-person spread of COVID-19 is to practice preventative actions including:

- avoiding close contact with people who are sick
- avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- staying home when you are sick
- covering your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throwing the tissue in the trash
- cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces
- washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds

As we work to minimize the impact of COVID-19, we understand there are many questions about your health, the health of your family, and the health of others in the workplace. HHS is following the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) human resources flexibilities and authorities for COVID-19 located on OPM's [COVID-19 website](#). I also encourage you to visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's \(CDC\) website](#) for up-to-date information and guidance on how to prepare against COVID-19. **If you think you have been exposed to COVID-19 and develop a fever and symptoms of respiratory illness, such as a cough or difficulty breathing, you should seek medical care immediately. You should call ahead to your doctor's office to tell them you may have COVID-19, so they can take steps to keep other people from getting infected or exposed.**

Effective immediately, HHS Operating and Staff Division Heads have the authority to cancel or postpone all non-essential travel, and to limit attendance at large meetings that are not mission-critical. Additionally, HHS, like other government agencies, is reviewing its continuity of operations (COOP) plan and is taking the necessary steps to ensure the department is prepared to continue our vital public health mission in the event our day-to-day operations are impacted.

At this time, we are evaluating and actively testing our IT systems to ensure we are prepared for greater than usual telework if required. Employees who participate in telework are encouraged to take their laptops and work assignments home daily in the event access to their place of duty is temporarily restricted. Employees who do not have current telework agreements are encouraged to work with their supervisors to put one in place, if appropriate.

The HHS Office of Human Resources is coordinating with the Operating and Staff Divisions to provide additional employee resources. In the interim, if you have questions or concerns, please contact your supervisor.

We are closely monitoring the situation and will continue to provide you with updates when we have new information to share. Thank you for all you are doing to keep the American public safe.

Eric D. Hargan
Deputy Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services