



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer

VA Central Office
Washington, DC

March 6, 2020

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF HUMAN CAPITAL OFFICER (OCHCO) BULLETIN

SUBJ: *Updated* Preliminary Guidance during Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

UPDATE - As we continue to provide Veteran care and maintain workforce readiness, only mission-critical travel and training will be authorized. Conferences must be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to determine whether to cancel or proceed.

This OCHCO Bulletin notifies Human Resources (HR) offices of the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) [memorandum](#) providing preliminary guidance to prepare the Federal workforce for the potential impacts of COVID-19. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides this guidance to address telework and mission resilience, domestic and international travel by employees, management of visitors to Federal facilities as well as updated recommendations from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Telework and Mission Resilience

To be prepared for COVID-19, VA administrations and staff offices must incorporate telework in their continuity of operations (COOP) plans. If a COOP plan is in operation, that plan "shall supersede any telework policy." Therefore, administrations and staff offices should immediately review their current COOP plans to ensure that telework has been fully incorporated and that as many employees as possible have been identified as telework employees in the plan and are telework capable (or "telework ready").

Mission-Critical Travel and Training

Effective March 6, 2020, only mission-critical (or essential) travel will be permitted until further notice. Travel is mission-critical (or essential) when it is for the purpose of carrying out the mission of VA. Due to VA's unique mission, all travel and training requests must be closely reviewed to ensure approval supports providing care and benefits to Veterans. Travel that is not mission-critical (or essential) may be canceled or disapproved by the employee's supervisory chain of command. Further questions regarding travel support can be directed to the VA Travel Helpdesk at 1-866-533-0188.

Conferences

VA Administrations and Staff Offices/Organizations are required to review conferences, scheduled or planned to occur within the next 60 days, and determine whether to proceed or cancel the event. If Administrations or Staff Offices/Organizations propose to proceed,

authorization is required at the Under Secretary, Assistant Secretary, or Heads of Staff Offices/ Organizations level.

Domestic Travel

Employees planning domestic travel for personal reasons should routinely check [COVID-19 Information for Travel](#) for information about COVID-19 and take into consideration the location and purpose of their travel.

International Travel

VA employees who have spent time in certain countries or specific regions designated by the [U.S. Department of State as Level 4 \(Do Not Travel\)](#) are advised to stay at home and monitor their health for 14 days after returning to the United States. VA employees should seek medical advice if they become sick with fever, cough or difficulty breathing.

VA employees planning to travel to other destinations overseas are advised to individually review up-to-date overseas [travel information for destination countries](#) and the [Emergency Alert for Coronavirus](#) page. Approval for travel to any country outside the continental United States is approved by the Chief of Mission for that country. This is usually the Ambassador or his/her designee. Travel advisories are directly available at [Department of State Travel Advisories](#). Travelers should also consult CDC's [guidelines for the prevention of coronavirus](#) and visit the [CDC Travelers' Health Page](#) for information on specific country health conditions.

Guidance on Visitor Access to Federal Offices and Buildings

The Interagency Security Committee has established standards for day-to-day risk management of Federal facilities. State and Federal health officials are providing ongoing guidance to Federal agencies regarding control and containment of COVID-19 exposure. Based on that health guidance, the Facility Security Committee (FSC) and/or designated official (DO) in each Federal facility has the authority and discretion to set requirements for admission to Federal property. VA facilities should contact their respective FSC or DO for any further developments on visitor access, as well as for any developments related to protection of facilities.

CDC Guidance

The CDC continues to update the American public that the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is low at this time. Nevertheless, VA administrations and staff offices should review their plans and continue their preparations since this is an emerging, rapidly evolving situation. CDC will provide updated information on the [CDC website](#). Additionally, CDC and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) have created a page to highlight resources available for the protection of U.S. workers in all settings. See [CDC/NIOSH worker resources](#).

CDC's [Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#) may help prevent workplace exposures to acute respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, in non-healthcare settings where it is unlikely that work tasks creates an increased risk of exposure. The guidance includes planning

considerations for widespread, community outbreaks of COVID-19. CDC also provides [Interim U.S. Guidance for Risk Assessment and Public Health Management of Healthcare Personnel with Potential Exposure in a Healthcare Setting to Patients with Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#).

A list of everyday preventive actions to help mitigate the spread of respiratory diseases is available at [CDC Prevention and Treatment Actions](#).

Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever (100.4° F [37.8° C] or greater using an oral thermometer), signs of a fever and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours and without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants). Employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.

The CDC recommends that employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work or become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and be sent home immediately. Sick employees should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or an elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available).

Additional HR information and resources can be found on the [HR Emergency Resource Center website](#).

Employees should contact their HR office with questions. HR offices with questions regarding this bulletin may be referred to Worklife and Benefits Service at vaco058worklife@va.gov.

Issued by: VA/OCHCO/Worklife and Benefits Service