Office of Human Resources

Pandemic Planning Guidance and FAQ’s
Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

OVERVIEW

This guidance document and FAQ have been developed to help RF campus representatives with planning and preparedness related to COVID-19 and to assist with responding to employee questions at their respective locations. As this is an evolving situation, information will be added as necessary.

The COVID-19 update on the RF homepage links to SUNY’s Health Alert which provides essential resources and advisories from the Centers for Disease Control and state and local health departments.

We are here to support you. Should you have any questions, please contact your campus RF Human Resources Office.

CAMPUS GUIDANCE

The following steps should be taken by campus staff in the pandemic planning process at each individual campus:

1. Appoint an RF representative to be the point of contact for all information regarding pandemic and business continuity plans.

2. Contact the appropriate SUNY office to find out the status of their pandemic plans and request that an RF representative be included in all meetings, communications and planning.

3. Consider which departments, and which positions within each department, are essential for planning and preparedness.

4. Consider how business operations will continue in the event that many RF employees cannot come to work.

5. Consider feasibility of remote work options.

6. Develop a pandemic communication plan (in conjunction with SUNY) for RF employees.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

These are the areas that we are working on to provide assistance to employees. The following FAQs are designed to help answer questions and concerns that RF employees at your campus may have, and address issues that come up in the immediate future. The RF will continue to
assess the situation and update guidance as things develop. RF staff should also be following campus directives regarding site closures and reporting to work. Please let us know if there are any additional issues that you would like to see addressed by Central Office.

WORK/EMPLOYMENT

Q. Can I work from home in the event I am unable to come to work due to site closure or other issues related to COVID-19?

A. The determination of whether working remotely, alternate work hours and/or alternate work assignments are feasible for each individual employee is made on a case by case basis by managers and HR personnel at your campus. Decisions should take into account the technology available and/or means to do the work, and the ability to deliver a tangible work product related to the project or award the individual is paid from.

Q. How will my wages continue if I am unable to come to work for any reason related to COVID-19 and I am unable to work remotely or do an alternate work assignment?

A. The RF is implementing a temporary expansion of use of sick leave during an emergency health situation such as COVID-19. This means that up to 22 days of Paid Time Off (PTO) sick may be used when eligible employees must be out of work for reasons listed below. The RF will continue to monitor the situation closely and evaluate potential extensions to the 22-day period listed above. It is expected that remote work, alternate work hours and/or alternate work assignments will be evaluated as a first option and that PTO sick or another type of accrual will be used if that is not available. A combination of remote work and PTO may also be an option in the situations below.

- An employee is asymptomatic and is quarantined by a public health official or doctor
- An employee is approved or directed by RF not to come to the work location due to issues related to COVID-19
- An employee is directed by a doctor not to come to work due to a high-risk health issue. If you are unable to get a health care professional's note, work with your HR office. Please remember there are also options for telemedicine which can be found here.
- A school, day care or other special needs dependent care provider is closed and the employee needs to be home with their dependent

Employees may also use other appropriate PTO such as vacation, holiday, and personal time for the reasons listed above.

Q. I do not have a lot of PTO sick. Will I have to go unpaid if I am out of the office related to COVID-19 and unable to work remotely or complete an alternate work assignment?

A. The RF will advance up to 10 days of PTO sick to eligible exempt employees and 75 or 80 hours PTO sick to eligible non-exempt employees. Nonexempt workers whose shift exceeds these hours will have their normal biweekly hours advanced.
Q. I travelled to an area impacted by COVID-19. Can I be asked by the RF not to come to my work location?

A. Yes. The safety and well being of the campus community is of utmost importance. In that regard, leadership at your work location may ask you not to return to avoid potential spread of the virus. For information and travel advisories see the CDC website Information for Travel.

Q. Is a quarantine the same as being directed to work from home?

A. No. Quarantine is a state, period or place of isolation where someone who has been exposed to infectious disease is placed. A mandatory quarantine is something that is ordered by an authorized government official. A self-quarantine may be recommended by a government official or health care provider if there is a chance you have been exposed. If you are asked to work from home by SUNY or the RF, you have no obligation to self-quarantine, unless otherwise directed by an authorized individual or body.

Q. If I am asked not to report to my work location, but am not under quarantine from a public health official, will I be paid?

A. Your supervisor will determine if there is the ability to work remotely or complete an alternate work assignment. If that is not a possibility, you may use sick, vacation, holiday or personal PTO. (see above)

Q. What if I voluntarily quarantine for 14 days?

A. Your supervisor will determine if there is the ability to work remotely or complete an alternate work assignment. If that is not an option, you should use vacation, holiday, or personal PTO.

Q. I am asymptomatic and have been quarantined by a public health official. Will I be paid?

A. Your supervisor will determine if there is the ability to work remotely or complete an alternate work assignment. If this is not a possibility, you may use sick, vacation holiday or personal PTO. (see above)

Q. Will I still be paid if I can’t work because of a personal illness or to care for family members?

A. You can use PTO sick. Human resources at your location will evaluate if you are eligible for Family Medical Leave or NYS Paid Family Leave.

Q. What if school, daycare, or other dependent or special needs provider is closed and I need to stay home to care for my dependents?

A. Your supervisor will determine if there is the ability to work remotely or complete an alternate work assignment (see 1st question above). If this is not a possibility, you can use appropriate paid time off (see 2nd question above).
Q. If I am out on unpaid leave, am I guaranteed to get my job back when I am able to return to work?

A. Yes, employees who are on unpaid leave for reasons related to COVID-19 (and whose appointment continues after the unpaid leave period) will be reinstated to their former position or an equivalent position with equivalent pay, benefits, and other terms and conditions of appointment.

Q. If my office is closed, but I am still willing to work, will I be forced to use my Paid Time Off or go on unpaid leave?

A. Unless alternate work arrangements have been made by your manager/department in conjunction with Human Resources, you will either need to use your paid time off or go on unpaid leave. The RF is closely monitoring wage relief initiatives that are being proposed on the federal and state level and advocating with government officials on behalf of RF employees.

Q. Currently, I need a note from a physician if I am out of work for a personal illness for more than 5 days. Will I need a similar note if I am out because of COVID-19 illness?

A. We will follow established sick leave and disability policies. Therefore, you will need a note from a physician if you are out of work for more than 5 days due to personal illness. If you are unable to get a doctor’s note due to reasons related to COVID-19 and want to come back to the office, please discuss with your HR department.

Q. I am unable to work for reasons related to COVID-19 and do not accrue PTO, will my salary be continued?

A. The RF is concerned about the well-being of employees and will provide every opportunity to work remotely or have an alternate work assignment when possible. The RF is closely monitoring wage relief initiatives that are being proposed on the federal and state level and advocating with government officials on behalf of RF employees. Things are developing very quickly, and we will notify employees of all wage continuation options available to them.

Q. I am using PTO sick for issues related to COVID-19. How do I complete my timecard?

A. There are two new reasons in the e-time reporting system – COVID-19: Employee Illness and COVID-19: Other Related. Please use these reasons when completing your time card and using PTO sick or recording Non-worked time.

BENEFITS

Q. I am sick but can’t get to the doctor. Is there another alternative?

A. Yes, Empire Blue Cross, CDPHP, MVP and Independent Health all offer telemedicine services. Telemedicine services will be available with UMR (administrator of the Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Employee Health Plan) effective April 1, 2020. Telemedicine services allows individuals to meet with a board-certified doctor any time by live video. The doctor can discuss your
medical and/or mental health history, review symptoms, recommend treatment, and prescribe medication if needed. Information on the telemedicine services and how to access them can be found [here](#).

**Q. What happens to all of my benefits while I am on unpaid leave (ex. health insurance, retirement contributions, etc)?**

A. In the event an RF employee must go on unpaid leave, employees will be able to continue health insurance coverage temporarily at the bi-weekly employee rate for up to 30 days to make health care continuation affordable. The RF will continue to monitor the situation closely and evaluate potential extensions to the 30-day period listed above. For specific details on employee contributions and benefit continuation, please see your campus HR/benefits representative.

NYS disability benefits and the optional short-term disability benefit (if enrolled) will cover a disability caused by a pandemic like any other. Similar to disabilities not caused by a pandemic, employees will be required to use their sick time before receiving disability payments.

Basic retirement plan contributions do not occur while an employee is out on unpaid leave; however, the time is counted towards vesting requirements.

**COMMUNICATION**

**Q. How will I receive information while I am out of the office?**

A. The RF will continue to work closely with SUNY System Administration to provide information and updates. The RF homepage links to SUNY’s Health Alert which provides essential resources and advisories from the Centers for Disease Control and state and local health departments. This FAQ will be posted and updated on the RF’s Research Administrator’s Information Page.

**Q. In the event of a site closure/quarantine/evacuation, what will happen?**

A. The RF will follow the direction of local and state officials, as well as SUNY, in determining whether a site closure/quarantine or evacuation will occur at any of our locations.

**PAYROLL**

**Q. How will I receive my paycheck if I am out of work or the office is closed?**

A. Direct deposit will be the easiest and quickest way to receive your earnings. If you are not currently enrolled, but are interested in direct deposit, please contact the RF Human Resources office on your campus. The RF will develop a plan to handle distributing paychecks to employees.

**TRAVEL**
Q. Given the current uncertain travel climate, is it permissible to buy refundable tickets or incur some reasonable costs in the event travel plans get cancelled?

A. Under the current travel climate, refundable tickets are permissible if the additional cost is reasonable.

Q. I am planning a business trip. Is trip cancellation insurance allowable?

A. RF policy allows for reimbursement for protection against changes in travel plans (e.g., airfare refundable insurance), provided it is reasonably cost beneficial.

PROCUREMENT

Q. We need to make an emergency procurement. Do we need to follow competitive requirements as outlined in the RF procurement policy?

A. No, a sole source procurement can be utilized based on #2 below. The procurement should be fully documented to describe the situation.

A. When purchases qualify as Single Source procurement because of limited circumstances that justify procurement without open competition, one or more of the following circumstances apply: (1) The item is available only from a single source; (2) The public exigency or emergency for the requirement will not permit a delay resulting from competitive solicitation; (3) The awarding agency or pass-through entity expressly authorizes noncompetitive proposals in response to a written request; or (4) After solicitation of a number of sources, competition is determined inadequate.