

JOINT LABOR MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES REGARDING COVID-19 RETURN TO THE WORKPLACE -- Effective Monday 6/15/2020

As State departments and agencies decide which and when employees should return to the workplace, apart from the critical business functions required for the execution of statutory and regulatory mandates, a fundamental focus, for many operations shall be the maintenance of temporary telework arrangements where feasible. While most employees who can telework will continue to do so during the initial phases of workplace reentry, fulfilling department and agency missions may require that some employees work outside of the home. Both labor and management agree that certain basic principles should be followed when making those decisions.

1. **Safety First:** We agree that the health and welfare of employees is the primary consideration. Everyone should follow the guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Department of Public Health (DPH) and other guidance specific to the State of Connecticut.
2. **Telework First:** It is understood and agreed that not all jobs are conducive to telework. To the extent it is feasible and practicable, employees who have been able to telework will generally continue to do so, unless otherwise directed by the appointing authority. Notwithstanding the above, continued focus shall be on permitting telework wherever aspects of the job allow.
3. To the extent that employees are returned to the work site in stages:
 - a. Employees at particular risk from COVID-19 shall be returned to work sites last and other appropriate steps should be taken to minimize their risk of COVID-19 infection
 - b. Subject to operational needs, there should be a preference for voluntarism in all of these adjustments with seniority a deciding factor among volunteers, and inverse seniority a deciding factor where volunteerism doesn't provide enough volunteers.
4. **Personal Responsibility:** We understand and agree that we are all in this together. Every one of us shares the risks and the responsibilities of following the guidelines for handwashing, social distancing, wearing masks, and staying home if you are sick. Everyone should foster an atmosphere that encourages reporting of safety issues, and respect for mutual concerns about ensuring safe working conditions.
5. **Communication:** In changing any Level Designation, Human Resources shall communicate with the employee, and their union representative and shall provide all information about return to work location, guidance and requirements. This shall include any changes in schedule, hours and/or work location, with proper notice provided as prescribed by the applicable labor agreement. As part of implementing any return to work site plan, and before bringing more employees into the worksite, and in order to develop the maximum consensus between management and labor on these issues, each agency should:
 - a. Implement mechanisms for ongoing dialogue regarding adjustments, which includes information sharing about future plans and/or contingencies; and
 - b. To the extent feasible, include advance discussion on adjustments to course(s) of action or reversals of the same, so that they can be made quickly-to promptly address noted risks in dealing with COVID-19 infections.
 - c. Mutually consider special situations raising safety issues, including but not limited to employees required to work in varying work locations.
6. **Office Suitability:** If the Agency or Department occupies a building under DAS custody or control, or is in a DAS-leased location, it must ensure that its re-opening plan is consistent with DECD requirements, including providing for adequate social-distancing, building access, and work stations that ensure a healthy and safe work environment. Information on HVAC issues and capability with respect to COVID-19 should be shared with unions in the facilities.

7. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Gloves and other PPE shall only be provided to employees who require them to perform certain job functions. For those not in direct-care/custody functions such as handling mail, custodial work, certain trades and groundskeeping, non-surgical gloves will be provided. For most employees, gloves are not recommended for general protective use. Similarly, other types of PPE shall be provided by the department or agency only to employees who require them to perform their job functions and who are trained in using them. For more information concerning gloves and PPE, refer to the CDC guidance and applicable OSHA standards.
8. Social Distancing: Social Distancing is a simple and very effective way to prevent the potential spread of the COVID-19 infection. This includes staying six feet away from others as a normal practice. Agencies will be responsible for reconfiguring work areas, limiting elevator, stairwell, and common area use, and otherwise following CDC guidelines to ensure safe work sites. Eliminate physical contact with others, such as handshakes or embracing coworkers, visitors, or friends. Avoid touching surfaces that are touched by others as much as possible. Avoid anyone who appears to be sick or is coughing or sneezing. Departments and agencies will also explore other methods to facilitate social distancing including the continuation of temporary telework, staggering work schedules, to control the number of staff reporting to the workplace and working together at any one time.
9. Agencies that are in multi-tenant buildings must take into consideration the staffing needs of the other agencies and work in collaboration with other agencies in the building to minimize congestion.
10. Meetings: Until further Notice, departments and agencies should conduct future workplace meetings virtually using approved technology whenever possible. Where an in-person meeting is deemed **absolutely necessary**, the following protocols apply: All in-person meetings will be limited to 33% of the normal room occupancy; and in all cases the number of persons shall be consistent with the Governor's current Executive Order regarding the size of public gatherings. Meeting rooms must accommodate a social distancing requirement of at least six feet of separation for everyone in attendance.
11. Employees shall keep their immediate work areas uncluttered to aid in cleaning and disinfecting.
12. Employees should avoid touching their faces and wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water several times during their shift to reduce the risk of potential person-to-person infections.
13. Shared equipment where use cannot be avoided shall have adjacent wipes, and employees should use disinfectant wipes to clean the touch points on the equipment before and after each use.
14. Agencies should close or remove amenities not essential to their main function such as coat rooms or locker rooms. Employees should keep all belongings in their workstation.
15. Employees at worksites that serve the public should be permitted reasonable time each hour to wash their hands. Employees in the field should be allowed similar consideration. Agencies shall provide hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes at the appropriate locations throughout their assigned office areas/floors. Field employees will be provided hand sanitizer as part of their personal protective equipment. Agencies should carefully follow CDC guidelines about frequent cleaning of high touch points and common areas.
16. Visitors: The department or agency will determine when front-facing operations and admission of essential visitors may be permitted. Fulfilling some department and agency missions and work requirements include interaction with the public or fellow state employees. Such meetings should take place virtually whenever possible to ensure the protection of employees, clients, customers, and other visitors.
17. Vehicles: The parties will separately address return to worksite issues concerning state vehicles.
18. EAP: Labor and Management agree that it is important for workers to focus on their own well-being. Employees are encouraged to avail themselves of the State Employee Assistance Program (EAP) It is free and available to serve employees, family members, and members of the household with a variety of services which may prove to be a valuable resource during these trying times.