College of the Environment COVID-19 Response Guidance: Preparation for Potential Employee Absences

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Relevant UW Guidance:
• UW’s Coronavirus Website: Staff and Student Workers  

Dear Chairs/Directors/Administrators,

This situation around the coronavirus is evolving constantly and we expect more guidance specific to staff, faculty, and academic personnel in the coming days from the UW. In the meantime, we encourage you to review and update your unit policies and plans regarding continuity of operations for use in the event of a disruption to normal operations (e.g., suspended university operations, a federal facility closure, large-scale employee absences).

In the short-term, we would also like to provide some basic information for your consideration with respect to planning for potential employee absences. Specifically:

• **Unexpected Absence Planning:** Supervisors should work with their employees to establish plans for unexpected absences. Scenarios may include:
  
  o **Situations where an employee can work productively from a remote location:** Each employee should have a general plan in place for 1-3 days of work they can do remotely if they unexpectedly can’t get to their usual work location for any reason. Additionally, each employee should have a general idea of what, if any, work they might be able to accomplish remotely for at least 2 weeks if they are not able to get to their normal work location. These 2-week plans should be reviewed and updated with specific details if there’s an imminent possibility of work interruption. These situations should be managed as a standard telework arrangement with documentation of work products, deadlines, and other guidelines for ensuring continuity of employee work and university operations.

  o **Situations where an employee or employees cannot work productively from a remote location and are involved in mission-critical activities:** Supervisors should identify and prioritize critical operational functions under their purview (e.g., caring for animals/plants in an on-going research study, payroll, proposal review and submission). Care should be taken to ensure that alternate employees have been identified who will be able to take responsibility for completing these functions if necessary and that current process documents are available to help ensure consistency of operations.

• **Family Care Emergency Absences:** In this specific situation, it’s distinctly possible that even if workplaces don’t close, schools/daycares/assisted living facilities, etc., might. The University provides for family care emergency absences by allowing eligible employees* to use paid time off when these situations arise. Normally, employees are limited to a maximum of three days of sick time off to cover this kind of absence, however, if the family care emergency absence is due to closure of a place of care by order of a public official for any health-related reason, employees may use sick time off in excess of three days to cover these absences. Please remember, too, that if an employee can work remotely during a family care emergency absence,
that’s telework and should be managed as such, but if they cannot work due to their care responsibilities, they should be using their time off.

*non-temporary contract covered, classified non-union, and professional staff employees, unless a collective bargaining agreement or the Professional Staff Program states otherwise

- **Telework:** Employees may want to arrange to work remotely, even in the absence of suspended operations, facility closures, or family care emergencies. They personally may have underlying health conditions that make them more at risk for catching illnesses, or have family members at home who do. These requests can be managed as you would other telework requests, such as planning for what work they will accomplish, deadlines, and other guidelines for insuring continuity of their work and our operations.

- **Response and medical privacy:** The [UW’s coronavirus webpage](https://coronavirus.washington.edu) explains that should a UW community member be diagnosed with the novel coronavirus, “the relevant [local health department](https://www.health.wa.gov/) and the UW would initiate appropriate protocols to protect the health of anyone deemed to be at risk.” This same webpage recommends employees who are experiencing coronavirus symptoms contact 1) their medical provider and then 2) UW’s Environmental Health and Safety’s Employee Health Center at emphlth@uw.edu or 206-685-1026 for symptom monitoring and tracking. Additionally, if an employee or student is being monitored for novel coronavirus, the UW cannot legally release any personal information about them, including their location, so it is essential to maintain medical privacy and coordinate all communications with appropriate UW officials such as Environmental Health and Safety.

Finally, here is a list of resources that may be relevant to you:

- [UW’s Coronavirus information page](https://coronavirus.washington.edu) – The UW is maintaining this page to communicate university-wide updates and guidance, with links to a number of reputable sources of additional information.
- [UW Alerts](https://uwalert.washington.edu) – If you haven’t yet taken the step of registering for UW Alerts, please do so now. UW Alerts has been designed to keep the UW community informed during emergencies and situations that might disrupt normal operations.
- [Public Health – Seattle and King County’s coronavirus information page](https://www.seattle.gov/health/coronavirus)
- [UW Carelink](https://uwcarelink.washington.edu) - A resource available to any PEBB benefits eligible employees who are feeling distressed or overwhelmed and would like free, confidential counseling.
- [UW Telework Policy](https://hr.washington.edu/guidelines/policies/policies/telework) - University policy permits employees to telework when approved in advance by the employee’s supervisor or other designated official.
- [International Travel](https://hr.washington.edu/guidelines/policies/policies/international) - We ask that employees please carefully weigh the risks and benefits of any international travel, and review UW guidance and [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention information on COVID-19](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html). As always, be sure to register ALL official UW travel outside the U.S., so that the UW Global Travel Security team is best able to contact and support you during your travels.
- [San Juan County coronavirus updates](https://www.sanjuan.gov/twoweeks)
- [Clallam County coronavirus updates](https://www.clallam.org/coronavirus)
- [Pierce County coronavirus updates](https://www.piercecountywa.gov/Coronavirus)

If you have any questions on any of the above please feel free to contact Stephanie Harrington or Megan Russell (for HR-specific issues).