

Dear State of Maine employee,

Please find additional information and guidance attached to this email.

The State of Maine is a large employer, and our employees have countless public facing interactions every day. In order to continue to provide the services Maine citizens expect and deserve, DAFS is following U.S. CDC and Maine CDC guidance in response to the 2019 novel coronavirus, also known as COVID-19.

We are maximizing recommended safety protocols in order to minimize the potential for exposure. We are encouraging calm and thoughtful interactions, both with the public we serve and our colleagues. Please also know that this is a constantly evolving situation and that we will do our best to provide you with updated information as quickly as possible.

Social distancing – which means avoiding larger group gatherings and maintaining a distance of approximately six feet from others when possible – is encouraged. As new information becomes available and as circumstances change, we will explore additional options to enhance social distancing, including limiting on-site meetings; encouraging Maine citizens to access our services online; supporting telecommuting options; and using conference calling, among others.

As the Governor reminded us today:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water or, if soap and water are not readily available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick, and stay at home if you are sick.
- Avoid visiting older people or those with chronic health conditions in person to protect their health and safety. Find other ways to show them that you love them. Social isolation is a concern at times like this, but Maine people are resourceful in our ability to support each other.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw that tissue in the trash.
- Wipe down the things you touch often — door knobs, phone screens, home and workplace equipment — with disinfecting wipes.

Taking these simple important steps will protect you, your family, your neighbors, and your co-workers.

Please also refer to my last e-mail on this topic, sent March 6, 2020 at 12:41 pm.

Thank you for all you do.

Sincerely,

Kirsten LC Figueroa

Commissioner

Attachment:

March 12, 2020

The State of Maine is a large employer and conducts thousands of public facing interactions every day. In order to continue to provide the services Maine citizens expect and need from its government, we are using CDC guidance and professional judgement in response to the Coronavirus. We are maximizing safety and recommended protocols to minimize the potential exposure. We are encouraging calm and thoughtful interactions. Be kind and know that information is coming as quickly as possible.

Business-Related Meetings and Gatherings

As always, confer with your managers and supervisors before changing or implementing anything to ensure best practices in line with operational needs.

- For meetings and work gatherings, consider remote participation alternative formats: tele-conference, Skype for Business, Microsoft Teams, etc. We will be sending a flyer with this information soon!
- For meetings that are done in person, take precautions to include meeting in a large room or an open, well-ventilated space; spacing the chairs and participants in a social distancing manner; and keeping meetings short.
- Assess the need to host or attend conferences and large gatherings and determine whether alternative accommodations can be made to limit or mitigate potential exposure. If it is determined a conference is essential and cannot be delayed or conducted by other means, refer to CDC guidance on planning for an event at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events

Travel

Effective immediately for the next 30 days to be reviewed again in 2 weeks.

In State Travel:

- For now, in state travel is status quo. Remember to take the recommended precautions of washing your hands, social distancing, etc.

Out of State Travel:

- Cancel all non-essential business out of state travel, whether or not it has been scheduled. Attempt to recover costs, as many airlines, hotels, conferences, etc. may allow for cancellations or credits. It is understood that some costs may not be recovered.
- Essential travel is determined and must be approved by Department or Agency heads.

When determining what is essential travel, consider:

- Is the travel critical to the department or agency mission?
- Is the travel related to the department or agency Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)?
- What is the destination and is that location currently impacted?
- What is the mode of travel and does it involve movement through impacted areas described in the CDC link above?
- Does it place the employee into a higher exposure situation (i.e. large conference)?
- Can alternative methods of participation be utilized (phone, video, remote access)?

- If an employee is required to travel for work purposes, the employee will be expected to follow the CDC travel guidance in place at the time of the employee's return. CDC guidance may allow for the employee to return to work but to self-monitor for symptoms and practice social distancing. If the guidance requires the employee to stay out of the workplace for a 14-day period, assess if telework is an option for all or some of the 14-day period; if not, place the employee on administrative leave for the entire or the remaining portion of the required 14-day period. If the employee becomes sick, the employee should call ahead to their medical provider—before visiting the doctor's office—and then follow the medical provider's instructions and update their supervisor.
- If an employee chooses to travel for vacation, the employee will be expected to follow the CDC travel guidance in place at the time of the employee's return from vacation. Guidance may allow for the employee to return to work but to self-monitor for symptoms and practice social distancing. If the guidance requires staying out of the workplace for a 14-day period, assess if telework is an option for all or part of the required 14-day period; if not, the employee will need to use leave time or go off payroll during the entire or remaining portion of the required 14-day period. If the employee becomes sick, the employee should call ahead to their medical provider—before visiting the doctor's office—and follow the medical provider's instructions and update their supervisor. At this point, leave time would transition to sick leave.

Considerations for Employees who Interact with the Public

- Refrain from shaking hands. Think about what you touch. Wash your hands often.
- Emphasize staying home when sick, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene by all employees:
 - Consider posters or other notices to encourage [staying home when sick](#), [cough and sneeze etiquette](#), and [hand hygiene](#) at the entrance to your workplace as reminders for employees and clients.
 - Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles in work spaces, lobbies, conference rooms, etc. for use by employees and clients.
 - Instruct employees to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds throughout the day. Cleaning hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol is another option, if it is available in the worksite.
 - Allow employees extra time between interactions with clients to wash their hands.
 - Consider distance between employee and client, such as sitting on opposite sides of a table. Use conference rooms if more space is needed.
 - Visit the [coughing and sneezing etiquette](#) and [clean hands webpage](#) for more information.
- Engage employees in cleaning spaces and equipment after use with clients.
 - Provide disposable wipes or other appropriate cleaning materials so that surfaces used during meetings with clients (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by employees before/after each use.

- Consider Alternate Methods for Conducting Business.
 - Encourage clients to utilize existing electronic methods for conducting business in order to reduce in-person interactions with employees.
 - Develop and implement additional options for conducting routine business.
 - Allow for rescheduling of client meetings which must be conducted in person.

Further Considerations

- CDC provides guidance for those who become sick [here](#)
- CDC provides guidance for employers [here](#)
- Departments and Agencies are ensuring our Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) are up-to-date.
- Health care settings, first responders and correctional facilities have different considerations and may need to provide additional guidance to their employees. Our Human Resources professionals are engaged in these communications and responding to questions.
- Social distancing – avoiding larger group gatherings and maintaining distance of approximately 6 feet from others when possible – is encouraged. As information is updated and next steps are considered, we are exploring all options of social distancing including limiting on site meetings; encouraging Maine citizens to access our services online; supporting telecommuting options; etc.
- Please route questions to your supervisors and our [Human Resources professionals](#).