

NFFE Guidance on Dealing with Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the Workplace

With the COVID-19 virus spreading in the United States, the threat is becoming very real. Steps should be taken to ensure that management is keeping the workplace and NFFE members safe. OPM guidance has been vague to date and has placed decision-making and planning on the Agencies. As such, NFFE Councils and Local leaders are urged to approach Agency management and take the following steps.

1. First, has your Agency issued a pandemic plan or Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)?

- If so, does it adequately address the Union's concerns on workplace flexibilities (telework arrangements, travel for work-related matters, etc.)? Request a copy for review if not already provided to the Local. If a plan has not been issued, refer to the guidance below. Additionally, please share any guidance received from your Agency with NFFE National through your Business Representative.

2. If your Agency has not issued a pandemic plan/COOP, request a briefing with management on the coronavirus issue.

- Identify that the Local is seeking information on the Agency's plan regarding the current coronavirus outbreak. Even if the Agency has issued a plan, NFFE recommends the Local request a briefing to discuss the below issues.

3. Issues/concerns that should be addressed during the briefing (if applicable):

- What options do employees have if they are concerned about coming to work/using mass transit to travel to work?
- How does the Agency plan to address employees who come to work and show symptoms of respiratory illness?
- What steps is the Agency taking to protect employees who deal directly with the public on a regular basis?
- What is the Agency's plan for dealing with work-related travel, especially to places that have multiple confirmed coronavirus cases?
- What is the Agency's plan for dealing with work functions involving interactions with large groups of people?

4. Suggested outcomes/workplace flexibilities to propose to the Agency:

- **Provide all employees the option to telework.** The most recent OPM guidance strongly encourages Agencies to sign situational telework agreements with all telework eligible employees currently without a signed telework agreement. OPM is also urging Agencies to reassess their factors for determining telework eligibility to determine whether more employees may be classified as telework eligible.

- **Keep in-person meetings to a minimum and if feasible, replace with conference calls or video teleconferencing (VTC).** Incorporating “social distancing,” according to OPM, will ensure that the government will be able to continue to function efficiently and effectively.
- **Temporarily suspend attendance all large gatherings, like conferences and conventions.** Again, this incorporates the practice of “social distancing.”
- **Temporarily suspend all work-related travel.**
- **If travel is required, allow employees to travel using a government-owned vehicle or privately-owned vehicle if feasible.** This option will avoid public exposure on airplanes/trains.
- **Provide administrative leave to employees who have been exposed to or are showing symptoms of respiratory illness and are unable to telework.** This is a preventative measure to avoid contact and the spread of illness to other employees.
- **Ensure that common work areas and equipment are being sanitized on a daily basis.** This includes conference rooms, printer/copier areas, break rooms.
- **Ensure protective gear and hygiene supplies are provided and easily accessible to employees.** Protective gear includes face masks and gloves for employees who regularly deal with the public. Hygiene supplies can include hand sanitizer and soap.
- **Stagger start/stop times and work days for employees.** This will incorporate the practice of “social distancing.”

If your Agency is being unreasonable or is refusing to meet with you to discuss its plan, contact your business representative about possible congressional, media, or legal actions.