

# Re-entry to Workplace Plan for State Employees

Updated June 26, 2020

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# RE-ENTRY TO THE WORKPLACE PLAN FOR STATE EMPLOYEE

## INTRODUCTION

The Re-Entry to the Workplace Plan for State Employees was developed by the South Carolina Department of Administration (Admin) in May 2020. The information in the guide was based on the information available to Admin and South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) at the time of publication.

As employees have re-entered the workforce during Phase 1, Admin has worked closely with the Governor's Office, DHEC, state agencies, and other stakeholders to learn from experiences during this first phase of re-entry and have used those experiences to refine and modify guidelines for Phase 2 of re-entry to the workplace. Safely returning employees to the workplace while still serving citizens of the State is critical to South Carolina's public and economic health.

With consideration to balancing the safety of State employees, the services needed by South Carolina's citizens and the economic health of the State, and after discussions with the Governor's Office, DHEC, and other stakeholders, the details of Phase 2 of the Re-Entry Plan have been modified from the version issued in May 2020. These modifications are set forth below. Phase 2 of re-entry to the workplace with these modifications will begin on July 6, 2020. All content of the Re-Entry Plan that is new or modified from the previous version is underlined.

Returning employees to the workplace during and after the COVID-19 pandemic requires an incremental and flexible approach. Due to differences in the mission and operations of each agency, the rate at which employees are returned to the workplace will vary from agency to agency. Advanced planning by agencies and adaptability will be key.

Admin developed three broad phases for returning employees to the workplace. These phases and the guidance on each phase are based on the information available at the time of this guidance and may need to be altered based on future guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and DHEC.

At the onset of each phase of returning employees to the workplace, agencies should communicate clearly to employees which employees will be returning to the workplace, the safety measures being taken to limit the spread of COVID-19 and advise on the appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE). Guidance on the use of PPE at each phase is outlined below but may be adjusted during the process of returning employees to the workplace based on evolving medical guidance on the subject. Throughout the pandemic, hand sanitizer and cleaning solutions should be made available at employee worksites at no cost to employees.

Additionally, agencies should consistently and regularly remind employees who are sick or have symptoms of COVID-19 to stay home and not report to work until symptoms resolve. At the time

of publication of this memorandum, according to CDC, symptoms of COVID-19 include shortness of breath, coughing, fever of 100.4 °F or greater, chills, muscle or body aches, headache, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, and/or new loss of taste or smell.

Negative COVID-19 testing is not recommended or required for people to return to the workplace. Even workers who were confirmed to have COVID-19 do not have to have negative testing to return to workplace. Instead, DHEC recommends that employees not come to the workplace until 10 days have passed since their symptoms began AND they are free of fever (100.4° F [38° C] or greater using an oral thermometer) for three days without the use of fever-reducing medicines AND their other symptoms have improved.

Agencies should closely monitor COVID-19 guidance from DHEC by visiting the agency's website: <https://www.scdhec.gov/>. Admin will also provide information and answers to frequently asked questions related to returning to the workplace. Agencies should continue to monitor Admin's website on COVID-19 for new information: <https://www.admin.sc.gov/COVID19>

# PHASE 1

**Phase 1 will commence at a date to be announced by the Department of Administration.** The commencement of the phase is conditioned on the procurement of personal protective equipment (PPE) by Admin, but will be no later than June 1, 2020. During this phase, agencies are to return employees to the workplace who cannot readily continue to work-from-home and are necessary to support ongoing critical government operations. All employees who can perform their job duties by working from home, with modifications and flexibility, should continue to do so to the maximum extent possible to promote social distancing.

- **Staffing During Phase 1:** Each agency has discretion to determine which employees cannot readily continue to work-from-home, however, generally agencies should only return those employees necessary to support critical government operations to the workplace. Agency operations should not be returned to normal functioning during this phase and should focus instead on critical state government operations.
  - Agencies are strongly encouraged to be judicious in the number of employees returned to the workplace during this first phase to minimize the likelihood of disease transmission in the workplace and the community. Only those employees who cannot readily complete their job duties while working from home should be returned to the workplace.
  - Employees who can productively work from home, with modifications to allow for balancing child care responsibilities and other unique challenges relative to the pandemic, should be allowed to continue to do so. This means that for some agencies and divisions/departments within agencies, few or no employees may be returned to the workplace at this time.
  - Even for staff returned to workplace because they cannot readily continue to perform their job duties from home, staggered staffing and/or alternative work schedules are recommended to the extent possible to limit the number of employees present in an indoor environment at one time. Agencies should consider staggering the start and stop times of employees' shifts or adjusting entry points into the workplace to minimize congregation.
- **Training:** Before returning employees to the workplace, agencies are encouraged to provide training to their employees on public health guidance, agency specific guidelines, and information about properly donning/doffing PPE and cleaning and disinfection. To the extent possible, the training should allow employees an opportunity to ask questions.
- **Signage:** Agencies are also encouraged to display signage throughout the workplace reminding employees of guidance from the CDC and DHEC on entering the workplace. A sample of signage prepared by DHEC and the South Carolina Emergency Management Division can be found at the following link: <https://admin.sc.gov/sites/default/files/CR-012550%201%202%202%202.pdf>

- **PPE During Phase 1:** Employees returned to the workplace during this phase because they cannot readily continue their job duties while working from home should be provided with PPE to the maximum extent possible. All employees who are expected to report to the workplace during this phase are strongly encouraged to wear cloth face coverings anytime when they cannot maintain a minimum of 6 feet from other people. Admin is procuring cloth face masks for agencies to provide to employees who do not have their own to use.
  
- **Follow Public Health Guidance:** Employees who return to the workplace during Phase 1 should follow the advice of public health officials including:
  - Stay home when sick or if you have been instructed by a health professional to quarantine due to close contact with someone with COVID-19.
  - Stay at least 6 feet apart and wear a cloth face covering when that is not possible.
  - Frequently wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol.
  - Regularly clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces (door handles, phones, keyboards, desktops, etc.). Wherever possible, remove high touch surfaces such as trashcan lids.
  - Regularly wipe down shared equipment including copiers, fax machines, and common workspaces before and after use. Avoid congregating in common areas such as break rooms and conference rooms. Agencies should consider closing or blocking access to common areas such as conference rooms to discourage gathering.
  - Conduct meetings through conference calls or other remote means even while employees are in the office to maintain social distancing.
  - Increase ventilation air exchanges and percent outdoor air where possible.
  
- **Workplace Modifications to Promote Social Distancing:** Before returning employees to the workplace, agencies should evaluate whether workplace modifications may be appropriate to maintain social distancing. For example, agencies should consider implementing one-way flow of movement through offices where doing so is feasible. Agencies should also consider posting signage limiting the number of individuals in elevators and stairwells at one time.
  
- **Vehicle Travel:** If employees must travel in vehicles to perform their job duties, agencies should limit the number of employees in a vehicle to the maximum extent possible and whenever possible only have one employee in a vehicle at one time. If the job duties of an employee require traveling with a crew in a vehicle, agencies should instruct vehicle occupants to wear face coverings, use hand sanitizer and allow for the circulation of outside air.
  
- **Temperature Taking and Screening:** The federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has advised that taking employee temperatures during the COVID-19 pandemic is lawful. However, DHEC has advised that individuals can be contagious without running a fever and, therefore, urges caution in relying on a fever as the

primary disease mitigation tactic. Agencies should carefully consider social distancing, confidentiality and consistency before implementing a temperature taking procedure if the agency does not have medical staff and are encouraged to consult with their DSHR HR Consultant before implementing a temperature taking process. Admin will also make available sample medical screening, including self-check assessments that can be used in the workplace.

- **Non-Essential Travel:** Agencies should continue to prohibit non-essential travel and require all travel to be approved by leadership.
  
- **Employees in Vulnerable Populations:** If an employee who cannot readily perform their work from home and supports critical government operations, indicates he or she is within a high-risk or special population (e.g., pregnant) or does not have child care due to school/child care centers, agencies should engage in a one-on-one conversation with the employee to evaluate the appropriate time and manner for the employee to return to the workplace. Agencies are strongly encouraged to continue to maximize work-from-home opportunities for employees in high-risk and special populations, as well as those impacted by school closures.
  
- **Interactions with the Public:** Agencies should continue to limit face-to-face interaction with the public to the extent possible while still maintaining critical government operations and establish minimum protective guidelines where face-to-face interaction is required. For example, it is strongly recommended that:
  - Both the employee and member of the public should be encouraged to wear cloth face coverings throughout the interaction.
  - To the extent possible, agencies should identify one area within the office where all face-to-face meetings with members of the public will be conducted.
  - Areas where face-to-face meetings are being held should have clear social distancing markings and agencies should consider adding a sneeze guard or similar barrier between the employee and member of the public.
  - Agencies are strongly encouraged to only see members of the public by appointment and not accept walk-ins during Phase 1. A member of the public should be instructed to call a designated number upon arrival for the meeting.
  - Areas where face-to-face meetings are held should be wiped down with disinfecting solutions or wipes after each meeting is concluded and before another meeting is held. Areas should be thoroughly cleaned each evening.
  - Office restrooms should be closed to the public.
  - Agencies should make plans to sanitize and disinfect writing utensils and other items such as clipboards used by the public.
  
- **Employee Exposure Protocols:** If an employee who has returned to the workplace contracts COVID-19, the agency should notify fellow employees using the exposure communications prepared by Admin and found at the following link: <https://www.admin.sc.gov/sites/default/files/Employee%20Exposure%20Notice.pdf>

- Agencies should identify a point of contact to answer employee questions regarding exposure and it is strongly encouraged the point of contact be either a health care professional, if one is employed by the agency, or a member of human resources. Communications regarding exposure should not be initiated or directed by front line supervisors and agencies must adhere to confidentiality requirements.
- Employees exposed to a co-worker with confirmed COVID-19 should monitor themselves for symptoms and may be recommended for a 14-day quarantine based on the DHEC Epidemiology team's risk assessment. If possible, the area where the infected individual worked should be isolated for 24 hours and then cleaned and disinfected. If it is not possible to delay access to the area, the workers who perform cleaning/disinfecting should wear appropriate PPE for protection against the cleaning materials and the virus. Refer to CDC Cleaning and Disinfecting Guidelines for additional information found at: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html)

If an employee has a member of their household who tests positive for COVID-19, the employee should notify their human resources department before reporting to the workplace to allow the agency time to develop a plan before the employee comes to the workplace. If the household member tests positive for COVID-19 after the employee is back in the workplace, the employee should not return to workplace until they have discussed with the DHEC Epidemiology team whether they need to quarantine for 14 days.



## PHASE 2

As employees have re-entered the workforce during Phase 1, Admin has worked closely with the Governor's Office, DHEC, state agencies, and other stakeholders to learn from experiences during this first phase and have used those experiences to refine and modify guidelines for Phase 2 of re-entry to the workplace. Safely returning employees to the workplace while still serving citizens of the State is critical to South Carolina's public and economic health.

With consideration to balancing the safety of State employees, the services needed by South Carolina's citizens, and the economic health of the State, and after discussions with the Governor's Office, DHEC, and other stakeholders, Admin is announcing that a modified Phase 2 re-entry to the workplace will begin on July 6, 2020.

Phase 2 re-entry guidelines are based on a return to normal service levels while taking into account the COVID-19 environment. Therefore, agencies are expected to provide their normal services, including face-to-face and walk-in interactions with the public, but should modify their processes to promote social distancing and other public health related guidelines.

The missions of agencies and the services provided by agencies to citizens vary greatly. As a result, each agency head or his/her designee will decide which employees are needed to return to the workplace to provide the services described above. An agency head may continue to allow employees to work-from-home if in his/her determination, it does not impact the employee's ability to provide normal agency services. The determination of whether an employee is allowed to work from home is at the sole discretion of the agency head or his/her designee, and nothing in these guidelines or other documents distributed by Admin should be construed to guarantee and employee the right to work-from-home.

- **Staffing During Phase 2:** During this phase, agencies should return to normal service levels while still adhering to social distancing guidelines. To ensure normal service levels, agencies may need to rely on staggered schedules or rotating teams of employees into the workplace on different days to promote social distancing.
  - Each agency head or his/her designee will decide which employees are needed to return to the workplace to provide the services described above. The staffing levels decided by agency heads will vary agency to agency and may even vary within agencies.
  - An agency head may continue to allow employees to work-from-home if in his/her determination, it does not impact the employee's ability to provide normal agency services. This would assist with social distancing by decreasing the number of employees present in the workplace. Agencies may allow employees who work in close proximity to other employees in an indoor environment to work-from-home some days of the week to allow for social distancing. For example, an agency that employs 60 individuals in a cubicle environment may decide to assign 20 per day/week to be physically present in the office to allow more space between work

stations and should require the remaining employees to continue to work-from-home on days they are not assigned to report to the workplace.

- **Screening:** Employees who are directed to return to the workplace full or part-time in Phase 2 should be regularly reminded not to report to the workplace if sick and/or experiencing symptoms of COVID-19. Agencies are encouraged to continue use of any screening protocols already developed.
- **Public Health Guidance and Workplace Modifications:** During Phase 2, employees should continue to be directed to follow all public health guidance including social distancing, regular handwashing, cleaning high contact surfaces, etc. All workplace modifications, display signage, and practices related to PPE and cleaning previously implemented should be continued in Phase 2. Employees should be directed to take periodic breaks in the workday to clean their work stations and high touch areas in their personal work environment.
- **Non-Essential Travel:** Agencies should continue to limit non-essential travel to the maximum extent possible. Agency heads or their designees have sole discretion to determine what is essential versus non-essential travel.
- **Cloth Face Coverings:** Employees returned to the workplace during this phase are strongly encouraged to wear cloth face coverings anytime when they cannot maintain a minimum of 6 feet from other people and/or in face-to-face interactions with the public. Agency Heads or his/her designees have discretion to require employees to wear cloth face covering when the employees cannot social distance, but exceptions should be made for individuals who have legitimate medical reasons for not wearing a mask.
- **Employees in Vulnerable Populations:** If an employee who is asked to return to the workplace, full or part-time during Phase 2, indicates he or she is within a high-risk or special population (e.g., pregnant), agencies should engage in a one-on-one conversation with the employee to evaluate the appropriate time and manner for the employee to return to the workplace. Determinations regarding whether employees in high risk populations will be allowed to continue to work-from-home are at the discretion of the agency and should take into account the operational needs of the agency, the job duties of the employee, and information shared by the employee regarding their status in a high-risk or special population. Specific guidance was shared with Human Resources Directors on June 16, 2020, regarding handling employees who self-identify as higher risk.
- **Employees Impacted by Child Care Availability:** If child care availability is limited and/or schools are still closed during all or part of Phase 2, agencies are encouraged to provide scheduling flexibility and other accommodations to allow parents of children that require care to balance work and child care obligations if they can do so while providing normal service levels.

- **Conducting Meetings:** During Phase 2, agencies should still conduct internal meetings through telephone or video conferencing to the maximum extent possible to promote social distancing. In person internal meetings should only resume to the extent that social distancing is possible, and PPE is available.
- **Interactions with the Public:** Agencies should resume face-to-face interactions with the public necessary in normal operations but should rigorously manage those interactions to promote social distancing and other public health related guidelines. For example, it is strongly recommended that:
  - Both the employee and member of the public should be encouraged to wear cloth face coverings throughout the interaction.
  - To the extent possible, agencies should designate specific area(s) within the building where all face-to-face meetings with members of the public will be conducted.
  - Areas where face-to-face meetings are being held should have clear social distancing markings and agencies should consider adding a sneeze guard or similar barrier between the employee and member of the public.
  - Areas where face-to-face meetings are held should be wiped down with disinfecting solutions or wipes after each meeting is concluded and before another meeting is held. Areas should also be thoroughly cleaned each evening.
- **Employee Exposure Protocols:** All processes and procedures for handling a positive case in the workplace that were previously established should continue during Phase 2.
- **Facility Checklist:** After the Re-Entry Guidelines were published, Admin published a COVID-19 Back-to-Work Checklist. The checklist has been updated based on new information distributed by the CDC and DHEC. A copy of the updated checklist can be found [here](#).

## PHASE 3

**Admin will announce the start of Phase 3 at a future date.** During Phase 3, all employees should be returned to the workplace except for those who have been identified as appropriate for working from home permanently and those allowed to work from home as a temporary accommodation.

During Phase 3, it is expected that only those employees that were already working from home before the COVID-19 health emergency or those identified as being appropriate to remain on work-from-home status permanently due to the nature of their job duties and related cost savings will continue telework. All other employees will be returned to the workplace full-time unless an accommodation is granted on a case-by-case basis. Recommendations regarding the use of PPE in the workplace during Phase 3 will be made in consultation with DHEC when the start of Phase 3 is announced.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Thank you for your work adjusting to an ever-changing landscape. Please note this guidance is by no means all-inclusive of considerations agencies will need to make, and Admin will continue to provide information over the next several weeks to assist you in making return to the workplace decisions. We also plan to hold conference calls with both Agency Directors and HR Directors to answer questions.

In the interim, if you have any questions regarding returning employees to the workplace, please contact your HR Consultant (803-896-5300) or Karen Wingo (803-422-8645).