COVID-19: Employee Guidance

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The university remains open as research, student support, faculty support and all other campus operations continue, though some in a modified capacity. What is changing is how some of our work gets done. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance recommends that we all practice social distancing. In order to do that effectively while keeping the campuses operating, it is important that we activate remote work arrangements for those whose work can be done from an off-campus location.

Between now and next Friday, March 20th, campus leaders will be completing their business continuity staffing plans and these plans will identify the work that can be done remotely. We expect that staff whose work has been identified for remote work will transition no later than March 20th; however, there are some operations, such as student services and support for faculty online instruction, where the needs for on-campus support may evolve over time. If you have questions about your own work location and expectations, please contact your supervisor or local HR representative. College and university leadership will continue to monitor local and national public health guidance and we will provide regular updates to you regarding the duration of these work arrangements.

I have heard from some staff who are concerned about their own job security. College and unit leaders share President Pollack’s commitment to getting through this extraordinary time with as little disruption to our workforce as possible. There is much we simply do not know about this public health situation, and actions that are taken out of an abundance of caution can sometimes feel very stressful. Please know that we are doing our very best to support you through these challenging times.
You will find a wealth of information here on the COVID-19 Employee Guidance site. Some things to point out:

- Because some K-12 schools have begun to close for short periods of time, we are permitting the use of Health and Personal (HAP) leave for staff to use for childcare even though their child is not sick. This is an exception to standard policy.

- In addition, we will be adding 10 Health and Personal (HAP) days* (pro-rated as appropriate for part-time staff) to the banks of all of our regular full and part-time, exempt and non-exempt staff, including benefits-eligible temporary staff, who are not currently at their maximum. These days can be used for personal health situations or to care for children or other dependents.

  *or Sick Leave days for staff whose collective bargaining agreements contain Sick Leave provisions

- If you find yourself out of work to care for someone in your family, New York State Paid Family Leave is available to staff. You can find more information below.

- Coverage is now available for telemedicine through our health plans. More information can be found on the Resources page.

I want to acknowledge the resilience you have shown during this unprecedented time. I am so grateful to have you all as colleagues. Please take care of yourselves and each other.

- Mary Opperman, VP and CHRO

March 13, 2020

See Below:

- Personal Preparedness
- Pay Guidelines
- Well Employees
- Illnesses in the Workplace
- Workers at High Risk
- Quarantine or Isolation
- Travel
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Personal Preparedness

All faculty and staff are urged to take basic preventative measures to prepare themselves and their families to avoid exposure to or infection by the virus causing COVID-19.

Faculty and staff who can work remotely are expected to do so as soon as possible, until notified otherwise.

Contact the Faculty and Staff Assistance Program at 607-255-2673 or ENI Confidential Counseling Services at 800-327-2255 for help with feelings of stress or anxiety about these events.

Pay Guidelines
Review the Guidelines for Pay Practices that apply to staff and faculty if they are quarantined or isolated due to illness while the campus is open. These guidelines will be updated in the event of a change to campus operating status.

**Sponsored Funds**

Policies in place for all university employees, such as paid time for quarantine, are applicable to employees funded by sponsored awards. We anticipate that these costs will be allowable on sponsored awards. Departments and principal investigators may contact Sponsored Financial Services (sfs-help@cornell.edu) if there are further questions regarding expense allowability in the event of this infectious disease-related emergency.

**Remote and Flexible Work Options**

We continue to encourage utilization of remote work for employees in cases where it is feasible. Supervisors will work with college/unit HR as appropriate to consider remote options while ensuring that departments remain open. Supervisors and employees are also expected to explore flexible scheduling models that take advantage of social distancing while still working on campus for duties that are best performed on campus. For more information, view the section on Business Continuity Considerations below.

**Well Employees**

Well employees are considered able to work, even if they have been in contact with or are caring for someone who is ill with an ordinary respiratory illness — in which case, typical preventive measures are recommended for them as caregivers.

While affording for maximum flexibility, well employees may be asked to come to work unless they have been:

- Caring for someone with a confirmed case of COVID-19, in which case their local health department will require that they self-quarantine.
- In a country with a CDC Level 3 Travel Health Notice or Japan in the last 14 days.
- In the same household as someone who is quarantined.

*Reference: “I am quarantined, am I able/expected to work remotely?” and “If a family member I live with, or care for, is quarantined, should I still come to work?”*

**FAQs**

[Accordion]

**Do I have to work remotely?**

The campus is open, so if you would like to continue to work on campus please speak with your supervisor about your reasons why. The goal is to decrease the density of our campus. If your supervisor is comfortable with you continuing to work from your on-campus location, please have a social distancing plan in place.

**My child’s school or child care is closed? What options do I have?**

**Remote Work**

The Cornell Flexibility In the Workplace Policy states that remote work cannot be a substitute for ongoing child care needs. In light of COVID-19, remote work may occur while dependents are present if their school or child care is closed and alternative care is unavailable, under the following guidelines:

- Cornell is not responsible or liable for the health and safety of your dependents while you are working remotely, or for your health and safety while you are delivering care to your dependents. It is up to the employee to determine whether work can be conducted safely.
- If a dependent is ill and requires ongoing attention, employees may need to use Health and Personal (HAP) time away from work, as needed. HAP guidelines are being relaxed during this period to also accommodate well children who are home due to school and childcare closures. Nonacademic employees may also be covered for NY Paid Family leave,
which provides paid leave to care for a covered family member’s illness. Please visit [https://hr.cornell.edu/new-york-state-paid-family-leave](https://hr.cornell.edu/new-york-state-paid-family-leave) for more information.

- Employees are expected to determine what they can reasonably accomplish while dependents are under their care (whether healthy or ill), and the amount of time they expect to be able to work.
- If you need to take a leave of absence during this time, but don’t have enough time accrued, you or your supervisor may request a Catastrophic Leave Donation; eligibility requirements will be relaxed during this period.

### Alternative Child Care

If your child is healthy and you are seeking a care provider, you may use these resources to locate care, though options are limited. If there are no health limitations, consider sharing caregiving responsibilities with other families by rotating who provides care for the children. Also, consider joining a [Cornell Parenting e-List or Newsletter](#) for updates and connecting with other families who have care concerns.

- [Care@Work by Care.com](#) – Cornell provides benefits-eligible employees and retirees with a free membership to Care@Work to help you locate babysitters, pet sitters/walkers, elder/adult care providers, and individuals to run errands. You may post a job or search the directory for a care provider. Providers are not endorsed by Cornell.
- [Child Development Council of Tompkins & Cortland County (other Counties)](#) – advises area families on child care options. Ithaca – 607-273-0259, Cortland – 607-753-0106
- Cornell Work/Life Consultant – may advise you on work/life issues, especially related to caregiving. Phone, virtual, and email consultations available [worklife@cornell.edu](mailto:worklife@cornell.edu) or 607-255-1917.

See also [Community Resources](#).

### My children’s school is closed, can I bring my children on-site to be with me while I work?

The presence and care of children at a university worksite creates significant safety and liability considerations for the university. While the care of infants and children at the worksite is not permitted ([Visitors at the Worksite policy](#)), supervisors are encouraged to be flexible in arranging work schedules, granting time off, and/or permitting remote work if necessary.

[/accordion]

### Illnesses in the Workplace

Employees who have symptoms of respiratory illness should stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever, and any other symptoms, for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g., cough suppressants). A fever is defined as a temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius taken by an oral thermometer. Employees with concerns or questions about their illness or seeking advice about whether to come to work should contact their personal health care provider or the Tompkins County Health Department (or, for remote employees, the appropriate local health department) to manage their situation appropriately.

### FAQs

[Accordion]

**Do I need to disclose to Cornell or to my local health department if I have been exposed or if someone in my family has been exposed to the coronavirus?**

For your safety and the safety of your co-workers it is important that you speak with someone at the Tompkins County Health Department (or, for remote employees, the appropriate local health department) so they can manage your situation appropriately.

**I don’t feel well, but I think I can still work. What do I do?**

Employees who are not feeling well should stay home. If you come to work, your manager may send you home if they are concerned about the appropriateness of your being in the workplace. If you are sick or aren’t feeling well, the most important
thing is for you to take care of yourself so that you feel better and stay away from others so that your illness doesn’t spread.

**I felt fine when I came to work but then fell ill. What do I do?**

You should immediately separate yourself from other employees, inform your supervisor that you aren’t well and go home. If you have symptoms that you are concerned about, contact the Tompkins County Health Department (or, for remote employees, the appropriate local health department).

If you or a colleague is diagnosed with COVID-19, your department should also request special cleaning of your workspace.

**My colleague fell ill in the office and then was isolated. Do I need to be isolated or quarantined?**

The Tompkins County Health Department (or, for remote employees, the appropriate local health department) will decide on quarantine or isolation by individuals and households.

**I work outside Tompkins County or outside New York state. Do I follow the Cornell guidelines or those of the county/state I work and live in?**

Employees who work outside Tompkins County or New York state should monitor guidance offered by their local or state health department to understand any local restrictions. Employees should also connect with supervisors and Human Resources partners if they are in an affected area, experience any symptoms, or have to undergo quarantine.

**If I get sick, how will my health bills be handled?**

COVID-19 expenses would be submitted under traditional health care coverage, including prescriptions and other treatment. All health care plan provisions, including medical necessity, in-network vs. out-of-network coverage, deductibles, co-payments, and out-of-pocket expenses will apply as with any claims submission.

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**Workers at Higher Risk**

Employees who are at increased risk for complications from COVID-19 due to underlying health conditions are urged to consult their physician about steps they can take to protect their health. These may include requesting a temporary change in job location, hours, assignment or duties, or implementation of additional protective measures to reduce their risk of infection.

If the employee’s work may be accomplished remotely, they should be permitted to work from home. If the employee’s work may not be accomplished remotely, they may use health and personal leave or vacation accruals if they wish to stay out of the workplace entirely.

If an employee at risk for complications from COVID-19 and their physician agree that increased social distancing in the workplace is prudent, but do not feel full removal from the workplace is needed, the employee should contact their local Human Resources office to formally request a temporary change. Human Resources will confidentially evaluate the request, explore alternatives, and attempt to appropriately address the employee’s health concerns while maintaining Cornell’s operations. A doctor’s note may be required.

Except for employees who formally request a change in job circumstances due to underlying health conditions, employees will generally not be reassigned to new duties, locations, or roles or be provided with paid sick/release time solely to address concerns about the potential for COVID-19 infection.

If local Human Resources needs assistance in evaluating the medical information related to these temporary requests for changes in work site location or job duties, they may consult with Medical Leaves Administration. In some situations the formal Disability Accommodation process may be applicable.
**Quarantine or Isolation**

Isolation and quarantine are research-based public health practices used to stop or limit the spread of communicable disease.

**FAQs**

[accordion]

**What do I need to tell my supervisor if I am quarantined by the health department?**

As with any absence, you are expected to notify your supervisor as soon as possible. The Tompkins County Health Department plans to inform Cornell about individuals who have quarantined, but it is an employee’s responsibility to communicate as well. During a period of quarantine, the employee is considered to be well and therefore will be expected to work remotely if their job responsibilities permit it. For this reason, it will be important for you to communicate with your supervisor to ensure mutual agreement regarding the expectations and deliverables during the arrangement.

**I am quarantined, am I able/expected to work remotely?**

During a period of quarantine, the employee is considered to be well and therefore will be expected to work remotely if their job responsibilities permit it. Individuals who work remotely while quarantined will receive regular pay.

If an individual who is quarantined develops symptoms, they should contact the Tompkins County Health Department (or, for remote employees, the appropriate local health department) to manage their situation appropriately.

**I am in isolation. Can I work?**

No. You are in isolation because you are not well and showing symptoms. It is important that you focus on your own well-being and not work during the period of isolation.

**When an individual is isolated, do members of the household need to isolate or quarantine as well?**

If an individual is isolated, their household family members would likely be required to quarantine. If you or other family members show symptoms, then you or others may be isolated as well. The Tompkins County Health Department or, for remote employees, the appropriate local health department, makes decisions about isolation and quarantine.

**If a family member I live with, or care for, is quarantined, should I still come to work?**

Please exercise caution and remain at home. You should talk with your supervisor as soon as possible about if you will be able to fulfill your job responsibilities remotely.

Due to the uncertain nature of this illness, nonacademic staff may be able to access New York Paid Family Leave (NYPFL) for the duration of the family member’s quarantine and claim their time off as NYPFL if they meet both of these requirements:

- A family member is quarantined under a directive from a recognized public health official (Tompkins County Health Department, other local county health departments, Cornell Health, etc.), and
- that family member is regularly dependent upon them for care.

Such leave is subject to all the other regular definitions of NYPFL. Please visit Cornell’s NYPFL site for more information. You may supplement NYPFL with HAP or vacation time.

Those who are not caring for the quarantined family member (and therefore cannot claim the time off as NYPFL) and whose work does not permit them to work from home should contact their supervisor to explore the possibility of an alternate work assignment that can be done remotely. If an alternate assignment isn’t possible, you may use your HAP or vacation leave, or take an unpaid leave, for all or part of this two week period.

See also Community Resources.
Can child care centers refuse to serve children of quarantined or isolated employees?

Yes. Childcare centers will decide based on what they deem most appropriate to minimize the spread of COVID-19 in their facilities.

Reference *My child’s school or child care is closed? What options do I have?*

See also Community Resources.

If I am quarantined, or cannot travel to my doctor, can I still receive medical care?

*NEW!*

Endowed Health Plans

Aetna began coverage for telemedicine, including tele-therapy in 2020. You should consult with your medical or mental health provider to see if telephonic or tele-video services would be an option for you. Normal co-payments apply, similar to in-network and out-of-network office visits.

Endowed Prescription Coverage

OptumRx is closely monitoring CDC guidance, as well as Federal, State and Local government requirements. Currently, OptumRx will allow members to refill their maintenance medications early to ensure they have an uninterrupted supply of medication during the COVID-19 threat. Early refill may not be available for controlled substances. You may also wish to check with your provider to determine if 90-day mail order prescriptions will meet your needs.

Contract College Health Plans

Empire Plan

Telehealth services are covered under the Empire Plan. Empire does not maintain a list of providers who have agreed to telehealth, but if a member speaks to their provider and if they offer telehealth services, the normal in-network or out-of-network reimbursement would apply, i.e. normal deductible, co-pays, co-insurance and reasonable and customary allowances (if out-of-network).

HMO-Blue CNY

HMO members will pay a $10 copay when utilizing MD Live, our Telemedicine Partner. Instructions on how to register and schedule a visit can be found at [https://www.excellusbcbs.com/find-a-doctor/telemedicine](https://www.excellusbcbs.com/find-a-doctor/telemedicine)

MVP

Members will pay a $25 copay for the visit when utilizing myVisitNow, our Telemedicine Partner. $25 copay for visit. To register, log in at [https://myvisitnow.com/landing.htm](https://myvisitnow.com/landing.htm), and choose My Account.

Contract College Prescription Coverage

Empire Plan

Empire Plan has implemented early refill overrides and/or extended-day supply requirements on 30-day prescription maintenance medications consistent with the CDC recommendation to have a 1-month supply of medication on hand. Member cost sharing will apply as normal.

HMO-Blue CNY

*(Same as Empire Plan)*
**MVP**

Members will be able to obtain an early refill on a 30-day supply of maintenance medications at an in-network pharmacy, regardless of whether the state the member resides in has called a state of emergency. Members should speak with their pharmacist to enter the applicable emergency supply override code into their dispensing systems to trigger the early refill override. Members with a mail-order benefit taking maintenance medications are encouraged to take advantage of receiving a 90-day supply of medication through the CVS Caremark Mail Order pharmacy mailed directly to their home.

[/accordion]

**Travel**

Visit the [Cornell University Coronavirus website](https://www.cornell.edu/coronavirus) for updates. FAQs related to Travel Restrictions & Registration Requirements address questions such as "Are students, faculty, and staff allowed to travel domestically?"

**FAQs**

[accordion]

**I am scheduled to travel for business within the United States. Should I still go?**

Please visit the [Cornell University Coronavirus website](https://www.cornell.edu/coronavirus) for the latest updates on travel guidance.

**I don’t want to go on my business trip due to my concerns. Will the university require me to travel?**

With few exceptions, the university will not require employees to travel. Talk with your supervisor about your concerns.

**If I cancel my business trip, will the university reimburse me for travel expenses and cancellation fees?**

Expenses related to business travel will be reimbursed if the university or you, after consultation with your supervisor, cancel your business trip. Travelers and travel arrangers are asked to minimize losses by promptly cancelling arrangements and seeking credits or refunds wherever possible. If you have any questions please contact your [business service center](https://www.business.cornell.edu/services), or, if related to grants or contracts, [Sponsored Financial Services](https://www.sponsoredfinancialservices.cornell.edu).

**Am I eligible for workers’ compensation if I get sick while traveling?**

In order for workers’ compensation to apply, work has to actually cause the injury/illness or it needs to be a result of some distinctive feature of employment. In our daily lives, we encounter infectious diseases, but unless our employment requires us to work with the infectious agent, workers’ compensation would not apply, nor would it extend to business travel and conferences. Employees who feel their circumstances qualify for workers’ compensation may file a claim for review by the Workers’ Compensation Board.

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**Visitors, Conferences, Events**

Visit the [Cornell University Coronavirus website](https://www.cornell.edu/coronavirus) for updates.

We strongly encourage faculty and staff to postpone or cancel any non-essential visits to campus by those outside of our Cornell community. Faculty and staff are encouraged to seek guidance from their colleges, the provost’s office or Human Resources if they are unsure about what qualifies as “essential.”
Business Continuity Considerations

Guidance for Managers and Supervisors

Remote Work

Use the Remote Work Guide for Departments and Managers to assist in making remote work arrangements.

Computers used remotely may need to be encrypted and configured for Virtual Private Network (VPN) access to Cornell servers for university-owned laptops.

Here are some creative ideas we’ve heard from university colleagues who are experimenting with staff coverage that reduces the number of individuals required to work on campus on a given day while supporting operations:

- Consider alternating or rotating schedules for your team where possible and reevaluate this approach on a weekly basis. The idea is that, in general, team members could share on-site responsibilities but not all members would need to be on-site every day.
- Experiment with different schedules. If you try something one week that does not work for your team, adjust the following week.
- Practice remote work drills. Have boxes ready near desks and ask a couple people on the team to go remote without advance notice.

Essential Employees

Cornell is a continuously operating residential university and many employees must work on campus to provide services that are essential to residential life, campus health and safety, critical research, the protection of physical and intellectual assets, or the continuity or resumption of academic programs and operations.

Employee Attendance

Managers and supervisors, including faculty who supervise staff, must not pressure others to come to work if they are ill or need to stay at home to care for ill dependents. Conversely, if essential employees are well, they should not be pressured to stay away from work for reasons such as their ethnic or racial background, place of residence, or status as a caregiver for a sick family member. Local or state health departments will determine when an employee is required to stay out of work, and in the absence of that guidance, employees should come to work when they are well.

The university encourages supervisors to afford flexibility during this time to help minimize the spread of the illness. Discuss and arrange to work from home in cases where it is feasible.

If someone is sick, they should focus on taking care of themselves and not be asked to work from home. Supervisors should be sure that employees are aware of CDC prevention guidance.

Given Cornell’s commitment to maintaining a safe and healthy workplace for all, managers and supervisors (with the support and involvement of local HR members as needed) should ask employees who are exhibiting symptoms of respiratory illness to go home and stay home until 24 hours after they are free of symptoms. Please cooperate with managers who are taking on this uncomfortable responsibility for community well-being.

A doctor’s note or documentation of dependent care responsibilities will not be required from employees when using sick time in these instances, except when employees are returning from long-term disability or a workers’ compensation-related absence.

Volunteer Service

Regular full- and part-time academic and nonacademic employees who are trained and registered as emergency responders with the Red Cross or other similar organizations may be granted up to five days paid leave per calendar year for time away from work needed to provide volunteer services emergency response. More information can be found in the emergency responder section of University Policy 6.9 Time Away from Work.
Operating Status

Faculty and staff may have concerns about measures that may need to be taken by Cornell in the event of widespread local, regional or national transmission of COVID-19. The university has extensive and thorough emergency procedures and is committed to doing everything it can to ensure the health and safety of our community. Because this is a rapidly changing situation, Cornell is prepared to enact a range of preventative measures based on guidance from state and local health officials, including a partial or full closure of campus if necessary to protect public health.

Please be sure to check for changes to the university operating status at https://emergency.cornell.edu/ as the definitive source for timely information about Cornell's operating status.