Staff-friendly Return to the Office County Employees

August 10, 2020

This document was adapted from Iowa State University [Supervisor Expectations](#) for use by ISU Extension and Outreach.

For Iowa State University employees, please refer to the [FAQ page](#) on the university's COVID-19 Response website.

Extension employees are key in our mission to build a #StrongIowa. It is important that county employees be aware of expectations and policies for office reopening. Sharing the plan, seeking feedback regularly, and modeling adherence to policies and procedures will help employees feel comfortable returning to the office. Visit the [Open for Iowa](#) website frequently for the most current guidance.

A Guide for Leaders, Supervisors, and Extension Councils

The Open for Iowa Committee encourages leaders, supervisors, and extension councils to follow the principles and guidelines of Iowa State University in the management of return to the office for county employees. Consider school and childcare challenges, caregiving or health needs that may affect an employee's work hours, location, or other parameters. Show flexibility when possible. Determine whether cleaning supplies are on hand and whether office spaces and common areas must be adjusted to meet social distancing guidelines. Leaders will set the tone for return and adherence to health-promoting policies and practices.

Considerations When Phasing Back to the Office

Consider which employees will return to the office first. In most cases, ISU is asking leaders and supervisors to return to campus offices first to devise a plan for other employees to return. This includes determining if the physical space is suitable for employees to return and maintain social distancing and if cleaning supplies are adequate.

- Assess what workspaces must be used for returning employees while adhering to social/physical distancing standards provided.

  This may include reducing workers per workspace to allow for increased physical distance between employees.

- Determine what, if any, common spaces should be made available (e.g., break rooms, conference rooms) for returning employees while adhering to social/physical distancing standards.

- Determine what physical barriers, visual cues, and/or signage are needed to support increased distance between individuals.

Some schedule and location flexibility may make the workplace more comfortable for all. Remember that all employees must be provided the same opportunities for schedule and location flexibility. For example:

- Talk with each employee about a plan to return to the office. Determine whether there are school and childcare challenges, caregiving or health needs that may affect the employee's work hours, location, or other parameters. Provide lead time for staff to make plans and show flexibility when possible.
- Consider if some employees can continue working remotely for an extended period based on their work duties.
- Stagger schedules so employees start and end their day at different times. This may help with physical distancing as well as caregiving responsibilities for employees.
- Rotate schedules so certain employees are in the office each day and work remotely on other days.
- If your employee is unable to return to work, share leave resources with the employee. Share information and expectations with all employees. Consult your county personnel handbook for county-specific information.

Employee Health and Safety

- **Health monitoring:** Communicate with employees about self-monitoring for symptoms before reporting to work.
- **Sick employees:** Communicate with employees the importance of staying home if they are sick or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.
- **Clean workspaces:** All employees should take responsibility to keep their workspace clean. Communicate expectations and directions for keeping commonly used surfaces and spaces clean (e.g., copiers, printers, desks, tables). CDC has additional guidance.
- **Personal hygiene:** Remind employees of proper hygiene practices.
- **Face coverings:** Employees who are able are expected to wear cloth face coverings when in the presence of others where physical distancing is not maintained consistent with CDC guidance and university guidance.
- **High-risk:** Councils and supervisors should make accommodations for employees who may be at high risk for illness. Employees are not required to disclose their health status to their employer. Employees may indicate that they have health concerns that affect their work without sharing personal health information. Remember, an employee's concern may be due to a person who lives in their home who is high risk and a desire to reduce exposure for that reason.

Campus Employees in County Offices

Iowa State employees housed in a county office will return to the office at a time that is mutually agreeable between county leadership, the employee's supervisor, and the employee. Iowa State employees will communicate with leadership in their home county.

Promote Positive Self-care Practices

This situation is likely to be stressful to all employees and stress can be detrimental to health. Additionally, for many the return to work in an office is a big lifestyle transition. Promote positive self-care practices to help employees focus on themselves as well as the Iowans they serve. The links below lead to resources to help with various areas of self-care.

- Employee Assistance Program (for employees and families)
- Iowa Concern – legal, finance, stress, crisis or disaster help for Iowans
- Mental health, stress, anxiety
  CDC guidance on coping with stress
  Anxiety around COVID-19, Utah State University Extension
- Managing caregiving burnout
  Human Sciences Extension and Outreach: Powerful Tools for Caregivers
  AARP Guide on Managing Caregiver Stress
- Sleep
  CDC sleep hygiene recommendations
- Nutrition
  Spend Smart. Eat Smart.
  USDA's tools for nutritious food choices
- Exercise
  CDC recommendations regarding active living
  Short workouts with Spend Smart. Eat Smart.
- Mindfulness
  National Institutes of Health Guide to Meditation
- Overall Wellbeing
  ISU Wellbeing

Communicate Effectively with Employees

After you have drafted your plan, share it with all employees and ensure understanding. Communicate in multiple ways including written communication, virtual meetings, and individual conversations. Be clear about where there is flexibility and where there is not. Reiterate expectations if you notice non-compliance. Model adherence to policies and practices. Communicate with employees often to determine if the plan is working and revise as needed.

Ensure your plan is in compliance with all workplace laws as well as guidelines set forth by the governor, Iowa Department of Public Health, Iowa State University COVID-19 Response, and local public health authorities.

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