

Subject Line: Keeping Our Workplace Healthy During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear City Employees,

I want to thank you for the resilience, dedication, and compassion you have shown during this unprecedented moment in our City and country's history. Over the last several weeks, we have seen our ways of life and work change drastically due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. In a time when we would normally come together as a community to celebrate the first signs of Spring, we've had to adjust to a new normal and do everything we can to prevent the further spread of this virus. To keep people healthy and safe, we must stay away from each other. This runs counter to almost every instinct we have to form bonds and be close to our communities.. I know this is a stressful and frightening time for people. There is no denying we are in for some tough times. But I know how strong we are as a workforce, and as a city. Together, I know we will come through this. It will take each of us acting with strength, kindness and selflessness.

I am reminded of the profound responsibility each of us carry as public servants. Our communities look to us to provide hope, assistance, and services during this challenging and stressful time. I am so proud of the way our City has responded. In the past two weeks, we have rolled out historic new programs to support our most vulnerable communities, including new shelter and hygiene services for our neighbors experiencing homelessness, grocery vouchers for Seattle families, and direct grants for small businesses that have been devastated by this pandemic. We stopped evictions for individuals, small businesses and nonprofits. We made sure that no utilities would be shut off for non-payment because of this emergency. Every day, we look for ways to build new resilience for our hardest hit residents and businesses. And through it all, we continue to provide essential services that our residents and businesses rely on.

One of my most important jobs as Mayor is managing this incredible workforce of over 12,000 people. I know that this pandemic has changed the shape of our workforce, and that so many of our jobs look completely different than they did two weeks ago. My priorities have been clear from the beginning: I will do everything I can to keep City employees healthy and safe and to ensure that impacted employees are paid. We do not know how long this emergency will last. But we are doing all we can to buffer the economic impacts on each employee.

The single most important thing we can do as a workforce is to follow public health guidance around social distancing. **As a reminder, if you are over 60 or have underlying health issues, you should stay home. If you are sick, you should stay home. All employees who are eligible to telework should telework. Managers have been instructed to be as accommodating as possible in allowing for employees to telework.** If an employee must be in the office, the department must ensure mandatory social distancing and hygiene orders are followed.

To help protect the health of our employees, we've also had to make hard decisions that undoubtedly have impacted the communities we serve and our workforce. We have temporarily closed many City facilities, including libraries, community centers, and public-facing counters. That comes on top of mandatory school closures statewide, and extensive public health guidance regarding high-risk individuals.

Last Sunday, I issued a directive to ensure that high-risk employees and employees whose facilities have closed will be paid. We have also expanded our telework guidance to ensure that employees who are

permitted to telework may have children or other dependents at home with them. You can find those policies in the attached FAQ or on our [COVID-19 SharePoint site](#). In partnership with the Seattle Department of Human Resources (SDHR), we have also created [new COVID-19 Workplace Protocols](#), which outline what City employees and department leadership must do in response to potential or confirmed exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace.

I know that there are a lot of questions and fear around potential exposure in the workplace. As the Department of Health and CDC have noted, you generally need to be in close contact with a sick person to get infected, which includes living in the same household as a sick person or being within six feet of a sick person with COVID-19 for about 10 minutes. If you have not been in close contact with a sick person with COVID-19, you are at low risk for infection. [The World Health Organization currently reports that the average time for an infected person to develop symptoms is five days](#). It is also important to remember, that while this can be lethal virus, the vast majority of people who contract it will recover. It is most deadly for people over 60, and for people with underlying health problems. But anyone can spread the disease. Since there is no vaccine and no cure at the moment, the only thing we can do to fight this virus is to stay away from anyone who might be infected and to practice good hygiene. The virus has spread enough through the community and we should assume it is present in any large group.

We're doing everything we can to ensure our new policies around teleworking, paid leave, and social distancing are followed. If you feel that these policies are not being followed in your department, you can contact SDHR directly at SDHRCOVID@seattle.gov, or you can contact the independent Office of the Employee Ombud at ombud@seattle.gov.

I encourage you all to stay up-to-date on the latest public health and City of Seattle workplace guidance by reviewing our [COVID-19 SharePoint page](#).

Thank you for everything you're doing for our communities. Working together, we're showing our country and world what responsive and responsible government looks like. I know the work you're doing will leave a positive impact on our City for years to come. This emergency will test each of us as a person, and us together as a city. But no one should ever count Seattle out.

Stay safe,

Jenny