WHAT SUPERVISORS NEED TO KNOW: COVID-19 & THE WORKPLACE

NOTE: this document is being updated on an ongoing basis. This version has been updated March 20, 2020 (1pm). Sections highlighted in yellow have been most impacted by recent updates. Please check the Human Resources COVID-19 website regularly for updates.

McMaster continues to closely monitor local and national developments around COVID-19. The University’s preparation and response is coordinated by its Crisis Management Team, with updates posted on the University’s COVID-19 website.

The situation is changing quickly, both globally and in Canada. The recent declaration of a state of emergency by the province and the announcement that all publicly funded primary and secondary schools, private schools, day care centres, and many services in Ontario are closed reinforces the dynamic nature of the situation. The university is continuously monitoring the shifting landscape and responding according to the best available evidence.

The University recognizes that the COVID-19 outbreak and the impact in our communities is exceptional, and that special measures may need to be implemented to help support supervisors and employees with the various circumstances that may arise.

At the time of preparing this document, Public Health Ontario continues to define the risk of COVID-19 in the local community to be low.

Included in this guide:

- Philosophy & Approach
- Purpose of this Guide
- Recommended Actions for Supervisors
  - Check in Regularly for Updates
  - Communicate with Employees and Encourage Preventative Measures
  - Engage in Business Continuity Planning & Identify Critical Functions
  - Consider Alternative Approaches to Enable Business Continuity
  - Prepare for Employee Absence or Requests for Accommodation
  - Consider Travel Required of Employees
  - Stay Updated on Pay-Related Decisions
  - Access and Encourage Use of Resources
Philosophy & Approach
McMaster University values its people and the important work they do in support of the University’s mission and strategic priorities. As this situation continues to evolve, McMaster recognizes that its employees may need additional flexibility, support and understanding. The recent letter from University’s President continues to highlight the importance of the health and safety of our employees while we focus on the delivery of required services, through adapted approaches.

Purpose of this Guide
This Guide has been created as part of a toolkit for supervisors, as they implement continuity plans for the impact that COVID-19 is having on their work unit and employees. It includes steps for supervisors to take, and information to consider, to ensure the University community is adequately prepared to respond to the evolving circumstances involving COVID-19 as it relates to the workplace.
Recommended Actions for Supervisors

1. Check in Regularly for Updates

Supervisors need to stay connected to the University’s COVID-19 update reports, as provided on the University’s COVID-19 website and related links, to remain current on the University’s response and any actions that may be required. We strongly recommend checking for updates at least once a day.

All communications will follow the protocols of the McMaster University Crisis Response Plan. Communications to the University community and/or public are centrally coordinated and reviewed by the Crisis Management Group, as well as the Office of Communications and Public Affairs prior to being released.

2. Enable Work from Home

1. All areas should ensure that employees who can work from home are able to do so.

2. There are certain employees who perform roles that cannot be done at home and that are essential or required in supporting the successful continuation of research and academic activities. Those employees will continue to report to work and are asked to work in partnership with their supervisors to implement strategies to enable social distancing and to ensure health and safety while in the workplace.

3. Employees who perform roles that cannot occur at home and are not part of the essential activities at this time will not be expected to report to work. Supervisors will communicate directly with employees in such circumstances. In the spirit of keeping employees working, it is possible that alternative work may be assigned (e.g. project work, editing or formatting materials, cleaning up electronic files, assisting with preparation of materials, etc.).

Continuance of Pay:

- We value our people and the important work they do. The scaling back of some operations at the University will be in place until at least April 5th, but this date could change based on any developments.

- We realize that many employees are concerned about compensation arrangements at this time, particularly those who are unable to carry out their regular duties on campus. McMaster is committed to ensuring that all employees
will continue to be compensated for the three-week period up to April 5, 2020. More details on how this will be operationalized for all staff groups, including temporary or casual employees, will be shared with supervisors and impacted employees in the coming days.

3. Communicate with Employees and Encourage Preventative Measures

**Key Messages for Communication**

- McMaster continues to monitor developments around COVID-19. The University’s preparations and response is coordinated by its Crisis Management Team which began meeting on the coronavirus in January.
- The University looks to [Global Affairs Canada](#), the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) along with public health agencies in Ontario to guide its decisions in working to maintain the health and safety of campus.
- The risk of contracting COVID-19 in Canada is still considered to be low.
- The [University’s COVID-19 website](#) site has been redesigned to provide more information and easier access to the information you need.
- Those events that are not core to the university’s academic mission and operations have been cancelled until at least the end of April.
- Everyone is encouraged to avoid non-essential travel outside of Canada.
- The Government of Canada has urged all Canadians travelling outside of Canada to return home.
- Anyone who has travelled outside of Canada is to self-isolate for 14 days, in accordance with instructions from Public Health.
- Anyone over 70 years of age and those who are immunocompromised are instructed to self-isolate for 14 days, in accordance with direction by the Province of Ontario on March 16, 2020.
- Everyone should avoid large gatherings of 50 people or more.
- Everyone should avoid close contact (within 2 metres) with anyone who is not their immediate family member.
- As of March 17, 2020 – the Province of Ontario has declared a state of emergency.

Supervisors are reminded of the need to continue to communicate with employees to share important updates and also check in on employee health and well-being, and answer any questions with regard to pay and employment. Detailed information on payroll guidance is now posted on the [Time Reporting and Payroll webpage](#).
Preventative Measures

As it relates to employees who perform essential or required work and who must be physically present on campus to do so, supervisors are asked to introduce other methods to support social distancing recommendations by Public Health authorities. Social distancing is seen as an important part of Canada’s approach to reducing the curve of potential infections. Social distancing measures are approaches taken to minimize close contact with others in the community. McMaster University’s philosophy in this situation aligns with the ethical principles used by Public Health Canada when considering appropriate social distancing behaviours in the workplace – specifically – trust and solidarity, reciprocity, stewardship, equity and fairness. Additionally, the principle of 'least restrictive means' should always be a consideration when enacting social distancing measures.

There are everyday actions that can be taken to help prevent the spread of germs and viruses, help to reduce your exposure, and protect your health. These actions include:

- wash your hands regularly and appropriately with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available
- cover your mouth/nose with a tissue or sleeve when coughing or sneezing
- avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- maintain social distancing
- avoid contact with people who are sick
- stay home if you are sick

4. Implement Business Continuity Plans

Supervisors should be taking immediate steps to mitigate disruption to critical functions.

A Critical Function is defined as:

- A function that when not delivered creates an impact on the health, safety of individuals or animals
- A function that may lead to the failure of an Academic / Administrative / Research Unit if activities are not performed in a specified period of time
Examples of such plans include:

a) **Working Remotely**

The President’s message is that all areas should ensure that any employees who can work from home are able to do so. Supervisors will help to find ways that services can be maintained online or on the phone. We may not be able to deliver services in the way we are used to, but we can still achieve great things by adapting our approaches.

In these ways, the number of individuals on campus will continue to be reduced, which continues to support a healthy and safe workplace, contributing to community and public health efforts to reduce risk of infection.

- Supervisors are encouraged to review the information available to help employees use best practices to stay healthy and productive when working from home.
- We remind supervisors of the importance of regularly checking in with employees who are working remotely. Check-in with employees to assign work, support work functions, and check-in on the health, safety and well-being of employees.
- It is important that supervisors maintain an active list of which employees are working either remotely or on-site.

b) **Support Healthy Social Distancing Practices**

For employees who perform essential and required roles that require physical presence on campus, working from home will not be possible. If working from home arrangements are not possible, supervisors should consider other adjustments to be put in place to reduce social contact, such as:

- increasing the distance between desks and workspaces, as well as between employees, students, and customers to the 2 metres recommended by Health Canada;
- adjusting hours to avoid peak times for public transit;
- staggering start times;
- using email and teleconferencing;
- no hand shaking;
- rotating physical attendance (e.g. 50% present today, 50% present tomorrow) or alternative methods to reduce the number of employees present in a workspace at one time;
- where employees are working on-site, remember to follow the Risk Management Manual Working Alone Program.
c) Leveraging Technology

There are a number of technological supports available to facilitate working remotely, or to enable connectivity without the need for group gatherings.

Information about tools such as Microsoft Teams and WebEx, which offer great flexibility for virtual meetings and communication, have been posted as part of the COVID-19 updates – please visit the [University's COVID-19 website](#) for more information.

Please visit the website of the Office of AVP and Chief Technology Officer to find details of [IT Continuity Tools & Services](#).

d) Temporary Adjustment of Work Duties, Hours, or Location

The application of additional duties for employees may be considered as supervisors prepare their business continuity strategies, and plan for back-up and cross-training on critical functions.

There may also be a need to consider temporarily transferring an employee to another position or alternate location for adequate coverage for critical functions. In these circumstances, to ensure administrative ease at a time when flexibility is critically important, this arrangement can be administered simply as an additional payment rather than as a transfer to a different position within Mosaic.

Temporary adjustment to working hours or assignment of additional hours or overtime may also enable flexibility if you require different coverage for service delivery, or additional coverage due to an increase in absenteeism on your team.

Recognizing the need for flexible and nimble procedures relating to the redistribution of Teaching Assistants' hours as departments are working through how courses will be modified to enable students' successful completion of term, typical processes relating to Hours of Work Form adjustments have been waived during this time. All Teaching Assistants will be paid for the hours they were assigned to work in the Winter 2020 term. Any Teaching Assistant who is assigned to work additional hours will be appropriately compensated. More information is now available about a simplified approach to processing adjustments to Teaching Assistant compensation.

Please reach out to [Human Resources](#) for support in exploring these options, to ensure that your employees are appropriately compensated in consideration of the changes you are seeking to make.
5. Prepare for Employee Absence or Requests for Accommodation

As always, should an employee be ill, they are encouraged to stay home.

Remember that employees’ personal health information is private and take steps to respect their privacy. In anticipation of a higher volume of absences due to illness and periods of self-isolation, there is a need to temporarily amend the University’s absence management procedures. The following will apply:

a) Employee Requirement to Report Absences
   In the event an employee is unable to attend work due to illness, they should continue to utilize the same methods for absence reporting as they currently do.

b) When an Employee is Ill
   - As always, should an employee be ill, they are encouraged to stay home.
   - Employees are eligible for sick leave benefit entitlements based on their applicable collective agreement or employment contract.
   - For more information about specific sick leave entitlements, please refer to the applicable employee group at https://hr.mcmaster.ca/.
   - Absences due to illness that are anticipated to be 10 shifts or more need to be referred to your Employee Health Services Specialist for appropriate absence management, pursuant to typical procedures.
   - Absences of less than 10 shifts that are related to COVID-19 will not normally require medical documentation.
   - Anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19 or who is awaiting test results is required to self-isolate. Further information about protocols for the workplace when an employee has tested positive or is awaiting test results are available online.
   - However, if an employee advises you they are ill or absent due to COVID-19, please immediately notify the Occupational Health Nurses in Employee Health Services via email at byrner1@mcmaster.ca to enable central tracking of absences due to COVID-19.

c) When an Employee Self-Isolates or is in Isolation According to Public Health Guidelines
   In accordance with instructions from the Government of Canada, the following individuals are to self-isolate for 14 days:
   - Anyone who has returned from travel outside of Canada (for 14 days after their return to Canada),
   - Anyone who is over the age of 70 (instruction given from the Province of Ontario on March 16, 2020)
Anyone who is **immunocompromised** (instruction given from the Province of Ontario on March 16, 2020)

Anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19 or who is awaiting test results is required to **isolate**. Further information about protocols for the workplace when an employee has tested positive or is awaiting test results are available online.

Should you have an employee who is required to self-isolate or isolate, the following will apply:

1. Advise the employee to **follow self-isolation or isolation instructions** and ask them not to come to campus during the period of self-isolation.

2. Faculty and staff are expected to **continue to work** while in self-isolation, although they should not physically attend work. Consider whether alternative working arrangements are possible during this period. For example:
   - working from home arrangements
   - leveraging technology, such as Zoom meeting, WebEx, MS Teams
   - assigning project work

3. Only if alternative working arrangements are not possible, the supervisor will approve the employee’s **leave of absence**. In such case, and provided the employee has followed the advice of McMaster University, Public Health, and Global Affairs relating to relevant preventative measures such as travel advisories, the following will apply:
   - Employees who have sick leave/salary continuance benefits normally available to them, pursuant to their collective agreement or employment contract, will be eligible to draw on those benefits while they are in self-isolation in accordance with advice from Public Health.
   - With the exception of those on interim (temporary and casual) employment contracts, employees who do not have sick leave/salary continuance benefits normally available to them pursuant to their collective agreement or employment contract, or those who have otherwise exhausted such benefits, will experience no loss of pay while they are in self-isolation in accordance with advice from Public Health, even if they are not sick. Such continued compensation will be based on the employee’s regular schedule or established stipend payment.
- Individuals who do not follow the guidance provided by McMaster University, Public Health, or Global Affairs may not be eligible for pay should they be required to self-isolate or are not able to return as expected from travel. If alternate work arrangements are not possible, the individual will be able access unused vacation time, other banked time, or the absence will be treated as an unpaid personal leave.

4. Employee Health Services is available to support you; however, there is no need for Employee Health Services to manage this absence or to be involved in a Return to Work process.

5. However, if an employee advises you they are self-isolating due to COVID-19, please immediately notify the Occupational Health Nurses in Employee Health Services via email at byrner1@mcmaster.ca to enable central tracking of absences due to COVID-19.

For more information about specific sick leave entitlements, please refer to the applicable employee group at https://hr.mcmaster.ca/.

A Self-Isolation Tracking Tool is available for Supervisors to use to keep track of 14-day self-isolation periods that staff may be undertaking.

d) When an Employee Makes a Personal Election to Self-Isolate

If you have an employee who has advised that they would like to self-isolate at their own election, with no guidance provided by Public Health to do so, you may approve this request through adjusted work arrangements or as a leave. In this scenario, there would not be access to sick leave benefit entitlements. In this case, the following would apply:

1. When you receive information that the employee would like to self-isolate at their own election, approach the conversation in a supportive way.

2. Consider whether alternative working arrangements are possible during this period. For example:
   - working from home arrangements
   - leveraging technology, such as Zoom meeting, WebEx, MS Teams
   - assigning project work

3. If alternative working arrangements are not possible, discuss options with the employee to consider if this time off may be an approved leave of absence. It is
possible that a leave may not be granted in circumstances where there is an operational requirement for the employee to be present. In such situations, you may explore other approaches to support social distancing with the employee. How you handle any time off that may be granted for this purpose may differ in accordance with the applicable collective agreement, employment contract, and with consideration given to the employee’s preference. Such options may include:

- vacation time
- banked compensatory time off
- personal leave days
- management days
- unpaid leave of absence
- flex time

4. Employee Health Services is available to support you; however, there is no need for Employee Health Services to manage this absence or to be involved in a Return to Work process.

5. Approve the employee’s leave and process accordingly on Mosaic.

e) When an Employee Requests Time off to Care for a Family Member(s)

If you have an employee who has requested time off to care for a family member, you are encouraged to consider ways in which you can support the employee. The same options as set out in section (d) may be explored with the employee in this scenario. As with scenario (d), above, because the employee is not sick, there would not be access to sick leave benefit entitlements.

In addition, it is important to note that there are certain statutory leaves of absence that are available to employees on an unpaid basis, some of which may be eligible for employment insurance. Please refer the employee to the following:

- McMaster’s Summary of Statutory Leaves of Absence
- Employment Standards Act, 2000 Guide

f) When an Employee Identifies a Requirement for Accommodation

Employees may request accommodation – for example, due to disability or family status, if they have a heightened concern about working with others due to their underlying health status, or if they have a requirement to attend to a dependant family member.
We encourage you to first have an open and supportive discussion with the employee to understand what temporary accommodations may be needed during this time, and to consider what is operationally feasible to meet these needs.

Consider the following documents:
- University’s Workplace Accommodation Policy
- Workplace Accommodations Procedure

If you require support in working through this request, please contact Employee & Labour Relations or Employee Health Services.

g) When an Employee May Have Been Exposed to COVID-19
When a there is a positive case of COVID-19, Public Health actively engages in contact tracing and case management to identify and contact anyone who came into direct contact with the individual.

Anyone who was in direct contact with an individual who tests positive for COVID-19 will be contacted by Public Health and advised to self-isolate.

Anyone who may have been in contact indirectly with the individual is advised to self-monitor.

Further information about protocols for the workplace when an employee has tested positive or is awaiting test results are available online.

h) When an Employee Expresses Concern about their Health and Safety
The health, safety and well-being of the McMaster community is a top priority. In accordance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act, supervisors must take every reasonable precaution to protect the health and safety of workers.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act also provides workers with:
- The right to know
- The right to participate, and;
- The right to refuse unsafe work

Some employees may have additional questions about their safety in the workplace, as it relates to COVID-19, or the availability of additional, reasonable precautionary measures that may be necessary, based on the nature of the role. There are additional materials with respect to Health and Safety in the workplace available to employees and Supervisors. Furthermore, planning for the impact of COVID-19 on the workplace may generate unique inquiries. Please contact Director, Health, Safety, & Risk Management at morinel@mcmaster.ca, or your Employee/Labour Relations...
representative with specific questions. As there may be specific additional requirements for healthcare or hospital settings, in Faculty of Health Sciences, please contact your FHS Safety Contact.

Should you be approached by an employee to help resolve a health and safety related work refusal, further to RMM 114 Work Refusal Program, please connect directly with the EOHSS team for further support.

6. Consider Travel Required of Employees

The Government of Canada is advising against all absolutely non-essential travel outside of Canada and has urged all Canadians who are travelling to return home. **Anyone returning from travel outside of Canada is to self-isolate for 14 days, include those who have recently returned from travel and may have attended campus before this directive was given.** The university strongly discourages employees from travelling outside of Canada.

**Global Affairs Travel Advisories** should be followed for any travel, and those returning from recent travels. These guidelines include travel bans for some regions. It is important to check in regularly for updates.

As a reminder, the following are available as resources to those that are traveling:

- **SOS International** (includes mobile app)
- **Travel Smart** (includes mobile app)
- **Sun Life benefits**, including **Emergency Travel Assistance** (must be enrolled in McMaster’s Extended Health Care plan to be eligible).

A **Self-Isolation Tracking Tool** is available for Supervisors to use to keep track of 14-day self-isolation periods that staff may be undertaking.

7. Stay Updated on Pay-Related Decisions

The HR Service Centre continues to be focused on ensuring that all payroll submissions and processing remain as seamless as possible. Please refer to the payroll cutoff schedule for HR transaction submission deadlines. There are no changes to the payroll processing schedule at this time, however, we will continue to monitor in alignment with contingency planning updates.
Payroll Guidelines with respect to employee groups will be provided to payroll administrators via email and posted on the Time Reporting and Payroll webpage. In general, faculty and staff pay will continue per normal processes up to and including April 5. If you have any questions, please contact Human Resources Services (hr.mcmaster@mcmaster.ca) or your Employee & Labour Relations Representative.

8. Access and Encourage Use of Resources

The following resources are available to you as a supervisor:

- **Human Resources Services** ([hr.mcmaster@mcmaster.ca](mailto:hr.mcmaster@mcmaster.ca)):
  - Environmental & Occupational Health Support Services
  - Employee & Labour Relations
  - Employee Health Services
  - Organizational Development
  - Faculty of Health Sciences Human Resources

- **Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP)**
  - Key Person Advice Line (support for Leaders)
  - Confidential services provided by Homewood Health through their website, or by phone toll-free (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)
  - For more information, please visit our Employee and Family Assistance webpage

- **Recruitment Best Practices and Guidance**
  - Refer to the Recruitment section of the Frequently Asked Questions on Human Resources topics related to COVID-19.