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

NOTE: this document is being updated on an ongoing basis. Sections highlighted in yellow have been most impacted by recent updates. Please check our website regularly for updates https://hr.mcmaster.ca/resources/covid19/.

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 Daily News. Additional information, including FAQs and resources, are also available on the University’s COVID-19 webpage.

The situation is changing quickly, both globally and in Canada. The recent announcement by the province that all publicly funded primary and secondary schools will be closed from March Break to April 5th, 2020, reinforces the dynamic nature of the situation. The university is continuously monitoring the shifting landscape and responding according to the best available evidence. The decisions that have been communicated by the university will be in place at least until April 5 and will be continued to be updated.

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
  - Access and Encourage Use of Resources
Philosophy & Approach
As this situation continues to evolve, McMaster recognizes that its employees may need additional flexibility, support and understanding. Supervisors are asked to implement Working from Home arrangements wherever possible, in accordance with the guidance and principles provided in the Supervisor Guide: A Decision Matrix for Establishing Working From Home Arrangements.

Purpose of this Guide
This Guide has been created as part of a toolkit for supervisors, as they develop continuity plans for any potential impacts that COVID-19 may have 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 any eventuality created by COVID-19 that could impact 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 Daily News 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. The Daily News COVID-19 site has been redesigned to provide more information and easier access to the information you need.

In the event of a business continuity interruption, 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. 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 Daily News COVID-19 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. This includes:
  - University and student-organized events both on and off campus (fundraisers, intramurals, performances, etc.)
  - Events at McMaster that are booked and hosted by outside organizations (tournaments, conferences, public speakers, etc.)
  - Some of the events being cancelled include: March Break tours, March Break camps and public lectures and presentations that are not part of an academic program
- Everyone is encouraged to avoid non-essential travelling 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.

**Preventative 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
- avoid contact with people who are sick
- stay home if you are sick

We recommend that you take active steps to remind your employees of the importance of these preventative measures. Consider high-traffic and high-volume areas within your workspace and take extra caution to ensure cleanliness of these areas. For example, consider:

- Maintaining a supply of hand sanitizer by photocopiers, shared printers
- Wiping shared phones, keyboards, desktops, keys with antibacterial cleansers
- Providing antiseptic wipes in shared workstations and other shared spaces, such as kitchen spaces, coffee stations and watercoolers.

Supervisors are asked to introduce 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.

3. **Engage in Business Continuity Planning & Identify Critical Functions**

Supervisors should review the University’s Business Continuity Planning ("BCP") program, using the related Business Continuity Workbook: Critical Functions Template to help guide and support planning.
In the event of a business continuity interruption, supervisors are required to take immediate steps to help mitigate the disruption. Supervisors will want to consider options to help support the continued delivery of critical functions under various scenarios that could arise.

For example, these disruptions could include:

- the absence of a large number of employees from the workplace
- closure of some or all buildings or units
- requirement to avoid large gatherings

To assist in your planning, pursuant to the BCP program, immediate steps include:

1. Identify critical functions and determine strategies to enable their continuity
2. Assess your emergency contact listings
3. Determine if your necessary critical supplies are up-to-date
4. Determine what functions must continue and what functions can be delayed

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

Critical functions and those in support of core academic and research activities need to continue during this time, such as: academic programming, support for students living in residence, research programs and projects, technology support services, and time reporting for payroll purposes.

Consider Alternative Approaches to Enable Business Continuity

In keeping with the philosophy underpinning the University’s approach to managing COVID-19 in the workplace, supervisors may need to think creatively to increase flexibility, support employees, and enable continuity of business. Examples of such strategies may include:

a) Working Remotely

Supervisors are asked to assess their operations and to encourage employees to work from home where their roles enable them to do so. For some roles, working from home will not be possible. When considering working from home arrangements, supervisors may find the Decision Matrix for Establishing Working From Home Arrangements to be helpful and are encouraged to review the Supervisor Information: Working from Home Arrangements guideline document for further information and resources.
b) Support Healthy Social Distancing Practices

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.

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.

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 Daily News for more information.

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

Some departmental considerations about technology, when considering your business continuity planning, may include:

- Does everyone on your team have access to a laptop?
- Are laptops encrypted?
- Are employees trained on how to use technology to:
  - conduct remote meetings/team discussions
  - share files and information
- Do employees know to save files on a shared drive rather than personal desktop?
- Do inquiries go to a key person’s personal email address? Is there a plan for redirecting those emails in the event the key person is absent due to illness or self-isolation?
- Do you have contact information for you to reach your team members and for them to reach each other? Do all team members have a cell phone?

**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 TA 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.

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.

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4. **Prepare for Employee Absence or Requests for Accommodation**

As always, should an employee be ill, they are encouraged to stay home. Employees continue to have access to the current benefit entitlements as outlined by their employee group, applicable collective agreement or employment contract.

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
As part of the University’s overall Business Continuity Planning, 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/](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.
     - 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 According to Public Health Guidelines**
   Anyone who has travelled outside of Canada is to self-isolate for 14 days after their return to Canada, in accordance with instructions from the [Government of Canada](https://www.canada.ca/). Should you have an employee who is required to self-isolate, the following will apply:

   1. Advise the employee to **follow self-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. 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, supervisor’s may 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.

6. For more information about specific sick leave entitlements, please refer to the applicable employee group at https://hr.mcmaster.ca/.
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 and
  - 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.
Unless otherwise instructed by Public Health in a particular case, no other specific actions or adjustments are necessary.

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. 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.

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.

5. 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).

6. 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](#)