



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
P.O. Box 41101 • Olympia, Washington 98504-1101

April 10, 2020

TO: All Appointing Authorities
All Human Resource Managers
Executive Strategy Team

FROM: Stephen Sinclair, Secretary

SUBJECT: Supporting Our Employees at Higher Risk Due to COVID-19

Although COVID-19 is a new disease, per the [Center for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), data is showing that **older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions** might be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. The purpose of this message is to provide you with information related to who is considered at higher risk, provide some general information related to what is known about the Department of Corrections (DOC) workforce, and to encourage you to support these employees through creative telework and work assignment options or approval of leave.

High-risk for severe illness

Based on what is known at this time, those at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19 include:

- [People aged 65 years and older](#)
- People who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility
- People of all ages with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled, including:
 - People with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
 - People who have serious heart conditions
 - People who are immunocompromised
 - Many conditions can cause a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment, smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications
 - People with severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher)
 - People with diabetes
 - People with chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis
 - People with liver disease

“Working Together for SAFER Communities”

- Pregnant people
- Those experiencing homelessness

General Information

Based on information we have available to us, we know the following about our DOC employees:

- 301 are over the age of 65
- 652 are on FMLA due to their own or a family member's condition

Supporting employees who are higher risk

As you know, the CDC and the governor are encouraging employers to be especially sensitive to those employees considered most vulnerable to COVID-19. Communication is being sent to all DOC staff that outlines those who are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. It requests consideration of expanded telework options or other creative options to keep these individuals safe, to include approval of leave, even if the high risk employee is in a position that is essential to government services.

We should not make assumptions or single employees out if we think they may be in any of these high-risk categories. If employees want to work in their regular position, they should be allowed to do so.

Employees need to self-identify if they feel the need to explore options to limit their exposure to others. If an employee self-identifies as being higher-risk, encourage the employee to engage in a conversation with their supervisor and/or human resources and get their thoughts and ideas about what options they believe would work for their situation. We recognize many divisions have already identified and implemented expanded telework options and other creative ways to keep employees safe and/or working. If you currently have employees on telework or alternate assignment it is not necessary to interrupt their telework/alternate work ability.

If telework or alternate work options are not available, or the employee decides not to take the options offered and the employee does not want to go out on their own leave, then the employee will have the ability to remain at work in their position if they choose. Please do your best to explore all options to provide telework or alternate work assignments or alternate work locations to your employees. We encourage you to reach out to each other to brainstorm additional ideas.

These options are intended for an employee that self-identifies as being high risk for severe illness from COVID-19. If an employee has a family member in the household who is or may be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19, they should reach out to their supervisor or local human resources office to discuss their options.

We hope this information provides you with some additional insights as you are planning for critical staffing should a high amount of requests be received and/or absences peak.

Send your questions to local human resources or DOCHumanResources@doc1.wa.gov.

SS:bf