



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

April 10, 2020

**TO:** All DOC Staff

**FROM:** Stephen Sinclair, Secretary

**SUBJECT: Employees at Higher Risk for Severe Illness**

As I review the progress we've made to expand telework options, I am proud of our supervisors and appointing authorities for thinking outside of the box and providing opportunities to telework for employees in positions previously considered ineligible. We expanded the use of telework on March 16, and I am happy to report we now have over 700 employees working from their homes. This is a great accomplishment, however we must continue to explore all possible opportunities to support our workforce.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that **older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions** may be at higher risk for more serious complications from COVID-19.

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

## Employees at Higher Risk for Severe Illness

April 10, 2020

Page 2

- 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
- Pregnant people
- Those experiencing homelessness

Many conditions can cause a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications. More information on higher risk groups can be found on the [CDC's website](#).

We must do our very best to find ways for our higher risk employees to be provided with opportunities to telework, or the ability to explore alternate work assignments and/or locations. If you are someone who is not currently teleworking and considered high-risk based upon the guidelines above, you can work with your supervisor to discuss if revised work duties may be assigned or explore other ways to provide opportunities to work from home.

If telework is not possible, we encourage employees at high-risk to reach out to their local human resources office if not comfortable remaining at work. Decisions to allow high-risk employees to be released from work will be made on a case-by-case basis, based on the employee's specific situation and within already established leave guidelines.

We understand this is a stressful time and your health is a priority. The [Washington State Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#) has developed resources specifically to address COVID-19 impacts on employee wellbeing. I encourage everyone to take a moment to consider your own personal health and review the resources available through EAP.

We are prepared and committed to support you. Please continue to stay positive, support your co-workers, practice social distancing, and remember to wash your hands.

SS:bf