

Updated guidance on COVID-19 and KSRE staff

Aug. 3, 2020

As the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve and affect our communities, offices and colleagues, new challenges and questions arise, and guidelines must be adjusted and added.

The health and safety of all staff members, program participants, volunteers and guests, is the top priority of K-State Research and Extension. Due to the continued spread of COVID-19 in Kansas, KSRE administration, in consultation with university administration, has approved the following workplace guidance for KSRE employees and participants.

Local units should follow K-State COVID-19 exposure protocol unless local health authority protocol is more restrictive. In that case, the more restrictive protocol should be used.

[K-State's COVID-19 protocol](#) is outlined below – with KSRE additions included. Be sure to check [K-State's COVID-19 page](#) for further university updates.

I am sick or think I might have symptoms of the coronavirus. What should I do?

Do NOT come to work if you feel sick, have a fever greater than 100.4 degrees F, or have other symptoms of the coronavirus as outlined by [the CDC](#). Contact your supervisor promptly by phone or email. Employees are encouraged to contact their local health department or health care provider for assistance.

I have traveled to a high-risk area or traveled internationally. What am I required to do?

Employees who are traveling or returning from a high-risk area must self-quarantine for 14 days as mandated by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, or KDHE. Please see the [Isolation and Quarantine guidance](#) for additional information on self-quarantine for potential travel-related exposure. If an employee can perform their job duties remotely, they may telecommute while in quarantine. Employees who are unable to report to work because travel to a high-risk area who cannot perform their job tasks remotely should fill out the FFRCA leave request form.

I have tested positive for COVID-19 and am exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19. When can I return to work?

Employees who have tested positive for COVID-19 and have had any of the COVID-related symptoms must isolate. The employee may return to work only after all of the following conditions are met:

- at least 3 days – 72 hours – have passed since recovery, defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications,
- improvement in respiratory symptoms – e.g., cough, shortness of breath, and
- at least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared. Persons who are immunocompromised should consult with their health care provider about the advisability of not returning to work until they have tested negative on an RT-PCR test.

I have tested positive for COVID-19, but do not have any symptoms. When can I return to work?

Employees who have tested positive for COVID-19 but who have not had any symptoms [must isolate](#). The employee may return to work when:

- at least 10 days have passed since the date of the first positive COVID-19 diagnostic test,
- the employee has had no subsequent illness,
- the employee remains asymptomatic, and
- for 3 days following discontinuing of isolation and the return to work, employees must maintain 6-foot social distancing and wear a covering for their nose and mouth whenever in a setting where others are present.

I do not have symptoms but have been in contact with a sick family member or have been advised by a health official or other person of authority that I have been a Close Contact with a known COVID case. What should I do?

The employee must quarantine for 14 days after the last contact with the case.

Employees who can perform their job tasks by telecommuting can continue to work remotely. Employees who are unable to report to work because of close contact with a known COVID-19 case who cannot perform their job tasks remotely should fill out the FFRCA leave request form.

I have been tested for COVID-19 and am awaiting results. What should I do?

An employee should follow instructions from their personal physician or testing site.

What is a "Close Contact"?

A person is considered a "close contact" if they have been directly within 6 feet of someone with a laboratory-confirmed case of COVID-19 for 10 minutes or more. The timeframe for having contact with an individual includes the 72 hours before the individual became symptomatic.

This section includes updates to the KSRE [Continuity of Operations document](#):

Continuity of Operations

What do we do if the county commissioners close the courthouse/county offices?

The extension office should close. Operations can continue to the extent possible through electronic means. If possible, phones should be forwarded.

Can an employee work at a closed location?

No. Our focus is on the health of our staff members and communities. Closing an office and then having someone working inside anyway contradicts that focus.

Can the extension office close if the county commission does not close other county buildings?

If the county commission has not closed other county offices, the extension office should remain open – unless there has been a positive test or staff think they may have been exposed. If that is the case, local units should follow either K-State COVID exposure protocol or local health authority protocol, **whichever is more restrictive**. Staff should take all possible precautions for social distancing.

Can a district office that is not located in a county building close?

Any decision to close district offices not located in county facilities should be made by the district governing body.

If the local office is closed, what type of leave should we use?

If telecommuting is not an option, staff can use FFCRA leave. For details about FFCRA leave entitlements and to find the leave form, visit [K-State's Human Capital Services website](#).

What options do I have if I am concerned about reporting to work due to COVID-19?

Contact your supervisor to discuss options. Telecommuting may be an option if job duties allow.

Employees whose job duties cannot be performed remotely and who are 65 or older and/or have underlying conditions that place them at higher risk of serious complications from COVID-19, or who have at-risk household members, may visit with their supervisors to determine their options for accommodation in the workplace or for taking accrued leave and/or leave without pay.

Medical documentation may be required from the employee to demonstrate the need for these accommodations.

The accommodations provided under this policy are separate and distinct from any reasonable accommodations that may be legally required under state and federal disability laws. The process and options outlined are in response to the pandemic circumstances and go beyond what is required under those applicable laws. Employees who wish to request a reasonable accommodation for a disability should contact the ADA Coordinator and follow the reasonable accommodation process.

I need to stay home because my child's school is closed. What type of leave should I use?

You may be eligible for FFCRA leave. For details about FFCRA leave entitlements and to find the leave form, visit [K-State's Human Capital Services website](#).

If someone from our office is staying home because of suspicion of or a positive test for COVID-19, and someone from the community is asking about them. What should I say?

Do NOT share the health status of another person without their permission. Questions about contact tracing must be directed to the local public health officials or the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.

Everyone in our office must now stay home because someone tested positive, and we were all potentially exposed. What should we do?

Follow the protocols above for isolating at home. Identify those who can continue working remotely and list them as the contact for the extension office. Post a sign on your locked front door (see template). Post a notice on your website and social media accounts (see templates), turn on the auto-response in your email, and add information to your voicemail.

Sample auto-response/voicemail text:

Thank you for reaching out to the (LOCAL UNIT) office of K-State Research and Extension. Due to employee exposure to COVID-19, XXXXX county's extension office has transitioned to remote operations, effective DATE. This will allow employees to isolate themselves and help protect the public."

Downloadable, customizable templates:

[Door sign](#) | [Website graphic](#) | [Facebook graphic](#) | [Twitter graphic](#)

Because we have advised the public that our office is closed due to COVID-19 exposure concerns, constituents and/or the local media are asking for more details. What can I say?

- When K-State Research and Extension staff and program participants suspect exposure and/or test positive for COVID-19, then we have explicit instructions to self-quarantine for the amount of time set by Kansas State University, as advised by KDHE and the CDC.
- To protect the privacy of affected individuals, we cannot provide comment on others' health status. Please contact the local health department or KDHE if you have contact-tracing concerns.

For further reference, see the [Communicating about a COVID-19 outbreak at a KSRE event](#) document.

Please direct questions to Extension Operations by emailing Jennifer Wilson at jrwilson@ksu.edu.