

EMPLOYEE PROTOCOL FOR COVID-19 MATTERS

The purpose of this policy is to communicate guidelines for reporting and managing COVID-19 related circumstances. GSSM acknowledges that this is a rapidly changing, complex circumstance which creates a variety of unique situations and conditions for GSSM faculty, staff, and their families.

Note that as this situation evolves, so too will the guidance and laws affecting guidelines. This information is presented as of September 8, 2020; this document is not intended to be comprehensive medical or legal advice.

GSSM has implemented the following safeguards to establish a work environment that encourages the health and wellbeing of all employees:

- Enhanced cleaning and disinfecting
- Physical and social distancing
- Telework and cancellation of non-essential business travel
- Seating distance of at least 6 feet and staggered gathering (starting/closing) times
- Restricted use of any shared items or spaces
- Employee training on safety procedures

Immediate Response

Employees who are sick or appear to have COVID-19 like symptoms should **not** report to work. They should seek evaluation through one of the telehealth options available on the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) COVID-19 webpage (www.scdhec.gov/covid19) or from your healthcare provider via telephone or get tested at one of the COVID-19 testing sites or mobile testing sites. Let the provider evaluating you know if you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19.

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are *fever, tiredness, shortness of breath and dry cough*. Some people may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but do not develop any symptoms and do not feel ill. Most people infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and recover. However, some experience more severe illness and may require hospital care. The risk of experiencing severe symptoms rises with age, in people with weakened immune systems and in people with pre-existing conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and lung diseases.

If symptoms are experienced while at work

If an employee becomes sick with COVID-19 like symptoms while at work, the employee must be separated and sent home immediately.

If the employee tests positive for COVID-19, either the employee or their supervisor **must** contact Human Resources **immediately**. Human Resources will contact DHEC and the South Carolina Department of Education (SDE). Management decisions of persons

exposed but not tested should be made on a case by case basis, using available epidemiologic and clinical information, in conjunction with DHEC guidance.

An employee's family member or the employee has been contacted by local health authorities as being potentially exposed to someone that has tested positive for COVID-19. What are next steps?

Employees must report if a household family member or if they have been contacted by local health authorities for someone testing positive for COVID-19. If so, they must seek medical attention (if symptoms are present), self-quarantine for a minimum of 14 days and be symptom free before returning to work.

Screening for COVID-19

GSSM has an agreement with CareSouth and Hometown Urgent Care for employee screenings in order to assist you if needed. Contact Human Resources for details.

- A healthcare provider's note stating the result of the COVID-19 test will be required. If positive, (after proper isolation) a second healthcare provider's note indicating a negative result and/or fitness-for-duty documentation will be required before returning to work.
- A daily call or virtual health check (e.g., symptom and/or temperature screening) will be conducted by Human Resources to monitor employees with signs or symptoms consistent with COVID-19. Human Resources will ensure proper protocols have been allowed before they return to work.

Protecting other Employees

If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, Human Resources will contact DHEC and the SDE. Although the responsibility of contact tracing lies with DHEC, Human Resources will also interview the infected employee to identify those individuals who may have had close contact with the employee within 48 hours prior to testing positive or first displaying symptoms.

Human Resources will contact those who came in close contact with the sick employee within the 48 hour period to go home and self-isolate for 14 days unless told otherwise by DHEC. Identified employees should self-monitor for symptoms.

The CDC issued new guidelines August 14, 2020 recommending that affected employees can return to work and resume other normal activities provided they meet each of these criteria: at least 10 days have passed since they first had symptoms, or 10 days have passed since an initial positive test if they had no symptoms; they have been fever-free for 24 hours without the aid of fever-reducing medication, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen; all other COVID-related symptoms continue to improve.

The new recommendations apply to individuals who had mild to normal cases of the virus. Those with severe to critical cases may remain infectious for up to 20 days after symptoms first begin.

Before the employee departs from work to home, Supervisors should ask them to identify all individuals who worked in close proximity (six feet) with them in the previous 48 hours to ensure you have a full list of those who should be identified. When sending identified employees home, do not identify by name of the infected employee or you could risk a violation of confidentiality laws.

- Document the call, including date and time, and all employee's names that have been identified in close proximity of the exposed in a file that should be sealed.
- Employees that have been identified should be sent home and quarantined for a 14 day period to ensure the infection does not spread.
- Contact Human Resources

Quarantine vs Isolation

It is important to understand the difference between quarantine and isolation. A person who has been exposed, but who is not yet sick, is asked to quarantine. A person who has tested positive, or presumed by a doctor to be positive, for COVID-19, is asked to isolate. Relevant DHEC guidelines for quarantine are as follows:

- You should not leave the quarantine location at any time, unless there is a medical emergency or requested by your healthcare provider.
- If you or anyone in your quarantine location requires emergency medical treatment for any conditions, you should call 911 for an ambulance. If you call 911, immediately tell the 911 operator that you are in quarantine due to COVID-19.
- You should avoid contact with anyone outside the home.
- You should avoid contact with individuals in your home as much as possible and maintain good personal hygiene at all times. If contacted by DHEC, follow all directions provided to you by DHEC to help prevent disease transmission.
- Isolation separates sick people with a contagious disease from people who are not sick.

How will employees be paid for Time-Off due to COVID-19 and other circumstances?

- Those employees who receive State Benefits can use paid sick time or accrued unused vacations hours (if applicable) for time off for sick leave.
- As other situations arise, please refer them to Human Resources.

Protecting Yourself at Work

GSSM employees should take the following steps to protect themselves at work:

- Follow the policies and procedures of the employer related to illness, cleaning and disinfecting, and work meetings and travel.
- Stay home if sick, except to get medical care.
- Practice social distancing by keeping at least 6 feet away from fellow coworkers, and visitors when possible, even when in or around non-work areas.

- Wear cloth face coverings, especially when social distancing is not possible. Cloth face coverings are intended to prevent the spread of illness. Face coverings are required at all times on GSSM campus.

Employees should inform their supervisor immediately if they or their colleagues develop symptoms at work. No one with COVID-19 symptoms should be present at the workplace.

Can an employee refuse to come to work because of fear of infection?

Employees are only entitled to refuse to work if they believe they are in imminent danger. Section 13(a) of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSH Act) defines “imminent danger” to include “any conditions or practices in any place of employment which are such that a danger exists which can reasonably be expected to cause death or serious physical harm immediately or before the imminence of such danger can be eliminated through the enforcement procedures otherwise provided by this Act.” OSHA discusses imminent danger as where there is “threat of death or serious physical harm,” or “a reasonable expectation that toxic substances or other health hazards are present, and exposure to them will shorten life or cause substantial reduction in physical or mental efficiency.”

The threat must be immediate or imminent, which means that an employee must believe that death or serious physical harm could occur within a short time.

At Risk Employees

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, employees with conditions that put them at a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 include individuals who are immunocompromised, as well as people with:

- Chronic kidney disease who are undergoing dialysis
- Chronic lung disease
- Diabetes
- Liver disease
- Moderate to severe asthma
- Severe obesity (body mass index of 40 or higher)

The Americans with Disabilities Act typically prohibits an employer from making disability-related inquiries and requiring medical examinations of current employees, except under limited circumstances, such as, when a pandemic becomes severe according to local, state or federal health officials.

As long as the pandemic is considered a “direct threat”, as defined by CDC and public health officials, employers are allowed to ask employees to disclose if they have a medical condition that the CDC has identified makes them higher risk for complications related to the COVID-19 illness. This documented information should be maintained in the employee’s confidential personnel record.

Handling Reasonable Accommodations Requests

If an employee asks for a reasonable accommodation, GSSM will engage in a timely and interactive accommodation process. Essentially, Human Resources must talk with the employee and discuss the disability and accompanying restrictions. Together, GSSM management and the employee should identify which essential functions the employee cannot perform and then share possible ways to accommodate.

Understanding and applying the 'direct threat' standard

Based on what we know now, those at high risk for severe illness from COVID-19 are:

- People 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

A healthcare provider's note indicating the employee is at risk due to the above guidelines should be submitted to Human Resources and approved by GSSM Management.

Confidentiality

Any information received from employees with regard to COVID-19 exposure, symptoms, and medical examinations should be treated as a confidential medical record (meaning that it is kept in a secure file separate from the employee's personnel file). It is not appropriate for the employer to discuss the individual employee's exposure, symptoms or results of medical examinations with the co-workers, or even managers who do not have a business need to know.

Cleaning the affected area(s)

The CDC also provides the following recommendations that have suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases in which GSSM will adapt and follow:

Close off areas used by the ill persons and wait as long as practical before beginning cleaning and disinfection to minimize potential for exposure to respiratory droplets.

Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the area. If possible, wait up to 24 hours before beginning cleaning and disinfection.

Cleaning staff should clean and disinfect all areas (e.g., offices, bathrooms, and common areas) used by the ill persons, focusing especially on frequently touched surfaces.

To clean and disinfect:

If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection (Note: “cleaning” will remove some germs, but “disinfection” is also necessary).

For disinfection, diluted household bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective.

Diluted household bleach solutions can be used if appropriate for the surface. Follow manufacturer’s instructions for application and proper ventilation. Check to ensure the product is not past its expiration date. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser. Unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted.

Cleaning staff should wear disposable gloves and gowns for all tasks in the cleaning process, including handling trash.

Gloves and gowns should be compatible with the disinfectant products being used.

Additional PPE might be required based on the cleaning/disinfectant products being used and whether there is a risk of splash. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions regarding other protective measures recommended on the product labeling.

Gloves and gowns should be removed carefully to avoid contamination of the wearer and the surrounding area. Be sure to clean hands after removing gloves.

If you require gloves or masks or other PPE, prepare a simple half-page Job Safety Analysis (JSA): list the hazards and the PPE (gloves, masks, etc., as needed), and the person who drafts the JSA should sign and date it.

If using cleaners other than household cleaners with more frequency than an employee would use at home, GSSM utility workers must be trained on the hazards of the cleaning chemicals used in the workplace and maintain a written program in accordance with OSHA’s Hazard Communication standard (29 CFR 1910.1200). Simply download the manufacturer’s Safety Data Sheet (SDS) and share with employees as needed, and make sure the cleaners used are on your list of workplace chemicals used as part of the Hazard Communication Program.

Employee Well-being

GSSM cares about the emotional, psychological and physical well-being of every employee as well as their families, friends, and pets. We have professional counseling services available for employees and their dependents, up to five (5) free one-hour sessions per household. We have arranged for Palmetto Counseling of Hartsville to offer this important service. You may reach a certified counselor at 843-453-9985 or

dlynn1110@gmail.com. Also for your health and well-being, GSSM is providing memberships to YMCA available for faculty and staff for the 2020 – 2021 year.

Additional Resources

For additional information, rely on trusted sources of information such as South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) <https://www.scdhec.gov/> or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) <https://www.cdc.gov/> websites.

- **World Health Organization (WHO):**
[Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#)
- **Center for Disease Control (CDC) - *Resources for Businesses and Employers:***
[Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#)
[Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection Recommendations](#)
- **Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)**
[COVID-19](#)
[Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#)
- **Internal Revenue Service (IRS)**
[IRS Notice: High Deductible Health Plans and Expenses Related to COVID-19](#)
- **The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**
[U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: HIPAA Privacy and Novel Coronavirus](#)