



**Temporary Guidance for Employees on Workplace Assignments,  
Telework, and Absences Related to COVID-19 Events**

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**March 12, 2020**

The COVID-19 virus poses an unprecedented public health threat. Using guidance from the CDC and public health officials, the USM Office has issued temporary [guidance](#) on employee workplace assignments, telework, and paid leave.

Please note that the USM Human Resources Office provides general guidance to the institutions on the USM Board of Regents human resources policies. The Presidents of the institutions have the authority and responsibility to implement those policies on their campuses, as well as the obligation to comply with any applicable collective bargaining agreements containing terms that vary from those policies.

**1. Q: Many USM students have been informed that their classes will resume in an on-line or alternative format following the end of Spring Break and that they are not expected to return to the campus for a period of time. Does that mean the institutions will be closed?**

**A:** No, the current plan is that USM's 12 institutions will remain open. However, COVID-19 is a highly dynamic public health threat, and as such, the circumstances could change rapidly—and often. Employees can and should expect any number of possibilities including (but not limited to) the expectation that they report to work as usual; temporary modifications or suspensions of certain operations or schedules; mandatory telework (for employees in telework-appropriate jobs); temporary re-locations or reassignments to different buildings or facilities; directed use of accrued leave; assignment not to return to work and placement on administrative leave or excused absence. Employees should stay informed through their supervisor and their institution's usual communication channels.

**2. Q: Should employees report to their usual work site after Spring Break?**

**A:** Not necessarily. Each institution will make that determination, based on the best information available at the time the decision must be made. Employees should stay informed, and make sure their contact information is up to date in their institution's human resources system.

**3. Q: How do employees know if they are in a position that is eligible for telework?**

**A:** Many USM employees already have telework arrangements under institutional policies and agreements. Though not all USM jobs are suitable for telework, many are. Any employee who is unsure whether their job is suitable for telework should speak with their supervisor or with their institution's Human Resources Office. USM institutions have been encouraged to allow or require employee teleworking to the fullest extent possible.

**4. Q: What should an employee do if they are expected to work (either telework or report to their usual work site) but they feel sick?**

**A:** Any employee who is sick should stay home, contact their health care provider, and communicate their status to their supervisor as soon as possible. An employee will be required to use available accrued sick leave, advanced sick leave, annual leave, personal leave, compensatory leave, or any other type of available accrued leave. Graduate assistants, adjunct faculty, and student employees who do not earn sick leave may be provided an excused absence without any loss of pay.

**5. Q: What if an employee is teleworking and becomes too ill to work or cannot work because they need to take care of an ill family member?**

**A:** Please see the answer above to question 4.

**6. Q: May an employee use sick leave if they can't work (including teleworking) because they need to self-isolate, are quarantined or need to take care of dependent children or family due to COVID-19 circumstances?**

**A:** The USM has issued the following temporary guidance to institutions to provide a measure of economic security for its employees.

In addition to existing uses set forth in policy, sick leave and advanced sick leave (ASL) may be used for the following purposes related to COVID-19:

- Employee's or family member's COVID-19 illness
- Employee's need to self-isolate or be quarantined if not ill or injured, if employee is not able to telework from home
- Employee's need to supervise a dependent child or dependent adult family member who needs supervision due to self-isolation, quarantine, or COVID-19-related school or daycare closure
- Employee is sent home from the workplace due to concerning symptoms or suspected COVID-19 exposure based on established standards, if employee is not able to telework from home

**7. Q. What if an employee doesn't have enough accrued sick or other leave available to cover a COVID-19-related absence, either for themselves or to care for a member of their immediate family?**

**A.** The USM has issued the following temporary guidance to institutions to provide a measure of economic security for its employees.

- **All Regular faculty and staff** may be provided up to 60 days of Advanced Sick Leave in the calendar year (prorated to the employee's FTE) under the applicable Sick and Safe Leave policies, regardless of their years of service. Employees in these categories must first exhaust all other accrued paid leave before ASL will be granted. Employees are obligated to repay the Advanced Sick Leave when they return to work. At that time, the institution will

deduct one-half of their accrued annual and sick leave as it is earned, until the advanced leave is repaid. During the period of this guidance, rules regarding required medical documentation may be relaxed as necessary.

- **Contingent 1 and Contingent 2 staff, Hourly Faculty, and Student Employees who accrue sick leave** may be permitted to use accrued sick leave for the purposes set forth above. Any restriction based on the total number of hours used within a particular time period may be temporarily suspended. Once such an employee has exhausted any available accrued leave, they may be provided up to 12 additional days of sick leave (prorated by FTE) for the purposes set forth above and cannot telework for any reason. Advanced sick leave should be limited to the amount of days necessary to equal a total of 20 days (prorated by FTE), both accrued and advanced, during any single fiscal year.
- **Graduate assistants and adjunct faculty** who are unable to perform their duties, either in person or via telework, due to the circumstances stated above or because they have been asked to leave the premises, may be granted an excused absence without any loss of pay.

USM Institutions should communicate procedures for granting Advanced Sick Leave to employees and supervisors, using established communication channels.

**8. Q: If an institution temporarily suspends certain operations or closes a building or facility, what should the employees who support that operation or work at that site expect?**

**A:** There are several possibilities, any of which may be combined during the period covered by this Temporary Guidance:

- i. An employee may be required to report to the worksite as usual;
- ii. If all or some of the employee's job can be performed remotely, they may be directed to telework or to work at an alternative worksite;
- iii. They may be required to work a different schedule;
- iv. If there is no work for employees to perform either off- or on-site, they may be placed on paid Administrative Leave, except when an employee is in a prior leave status.

**9. Q: Will teleworking employees receive paid Administrative Leave if certain operations are temporarily suspended or the university temporarily closes a building or facility?**

**A:** No. Teleworking employees will receive their regular pay; they will not be granted any additional paid Administrative Leave.

**10. Q: Will employees who are required to report to work as usual when certain operations are temporarily suspended or the university temporarily closes a building or facility receive additional compensation?**

**A:** Nonexempt employees who are required to work on campus during the period when certain operations are temporarily suspended or the university temporarily closes a building or facility will

be paid as usual. In addition, if other employees who support that operation or work in that building are granted administrative leave for the same time period, the employees who are required to work on campus should be given the choice of receiving compensatory leave or a cash equivalent payment equal to the amount of administrative leave granted those employees.