



Nevada Association of Counties
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Guidance for Counties in Response to Novel Coronavirus

*The information below is intended to provide county staff and commissioners guidance for preparing for and responding to issues and questions related to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). This guidance is as a suggested template only but has been prepared by NACO with the hope that it may assist you in thinking about how to approach this impending public health event. We encourage you to develop your own guidelines and policies in cooperation with your local health officials and resources. **PLEASE NOTE THAT FEDERAL AND STATE GUIDANCE IS CHANGING RAPIDLY** so the links in the document should be used regularly.*

Updated information from CDC is imbedded in the links below and the main source of federal policy information can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

Governor Sisolak and the Nevada Department of Health and Human Services is maintaining an updated Coronavirus site at <https://nvhealthresponse.nv.gov/>

The Nevada Department of Public Behavioral Health is maintaining an updated Coronavirus site at http://dpbh.nv.gov/Programs/OPHIE/dta/Hot_Topics/Coronavirus/

Governor Sisolak declared a State of Emergency in Nevada - information related to the Emergency Declaration can be found at http://gov.nv.gov/News/Press/2020/Governor_Sisolak_Declares_State_of_Emergency_in_Response_to_COVID-19/

1: Coordination & Community Impact Considerations

At this point, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are changing on almost an hourly basis. It is clear that the virus will have considerable impacts on the daily lives of Nevadans for months. It is unknown when the number of people experiencing symptoms of the disease will peak or how long the healthcare system will be dealing with patients who require definitive medical care. Recommendations for social distancing, hygiene and enhanced awareness of your possible exposure to the virus are intended to help reduce the number of patients requiring care at any given time in order to take stress off the limited resources of your community medical infrastructure.



Counties should, first and foremost, maintain open and regular communication with their emergency management. It is also very important for local elected and appointed officials to proactively engage with public health authorities, as well as healthcare stakeholders in their communities. County leaders should work with their emergency management directors to ensure they receive the latest information from the State of Nevada's Division of Emergency Management as well as the Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health (DPBH). The economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak will affect Nevada's communities in different ways. Your response should be evaluated in the context of your local community.

Factors influencing the extent of the impacts include employee absenteeism in workplaces, how the pandemic will impact especially vulnerable populations, and potential interruptions of business demand and/or supply chains. Likewise, within the county organization, important policy questions to be addressed include: possible travel restrictions; future cancellation of official functions and activities; increased attention to staffing; review of human resource procedures and policies; legal concerns, and support of the community as it deals with the impact of the pandemic in general.

The key to successfully addressing the public policy implications of this pandemic is regular, robust and candid communication with key community partners. County leaders should ensure they maintain an open dialogue at a strategic level with local municipalities, the local healthcare sector (hospitals, EMS, long-term care facilities, etc.), public safety (fire and law enforcement), judicial officials, education leaders from K-12 and higher education, the county EMS, and DPBH and/or county health department officials.

Likewise, close coordination with local business leaders—especially in those industries likely to be particularly affected by the impacts of the pandemic—is also important to ensure that community protection measures and messaging are consistently shared through multiple avenues.

Some counties have already established special committees to facilitate these conversations or may have active committees that can be repurposed to address the issues outlined above. Regardless of what form these committees take, elected and appointed county leadership should be prominently figured in these discussions. Proactive engagement and management of this event will ensure that the right messages get to the right people. Discussions about important considerations related to social distancing measures (such as possible school closures, business closures, event cancellations and the like) can be improved when local elected officials are engaged with each other to provide



their perspectives and policy expectations to those who will be formulating decision recommendations for later action.

Recommended parties to include in a formal coordination group:

- County Commission Chairperson
- Sheriff and other local law enforcement leaders
- County Manager or other key county staff
- Mayors and/or municipal representatives
- Superintendent(s) of education and higher education leadership
- Local healthcare leaders (hospital and nursing home management)
- Emergency Management
- DPBH and/or county health department
- Local business leaders from major industries
- Chamber of Commerce
- Human resources manager
- Legal counsel
- Local Judges
- County public relations manager

2: Operations

Managers and supervisors must encourage employees to remain home when they are sick. Consider taking steps to maximize telework options. For employees who do not ordinarily telecommute, ask supervisors to identify tasks that employees can do remotely, or provide alternative options for telecommuting, if circumstances later necessitate an expansion of telework.

Ensure each of your worksites are taking steps to maintain high environmental hygiene standards by cleaning surfaces with EPA-approved environmental disinfectants and adhere to CDC guidelines for handwashing and surface cleaning. In particular, routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops and doorknobs. If feasible, provide disposable disinfectant wipes so that commonly used services can be wiped down by employees before each use.

If the need arises to close county offices, consult with your DA prior to closings and announce closures through as many avenues as possible, including traditional and electronic media. For agencies with regular public interface, post signs and resources to



address non-pharmaceutical interventions and consider further efforts to mitigate exposure, especially for individuals showing symptoms, find more information [here](#).

Also consider, how the county will continue to operate and conduct official business if the county commission is unable to maintain a quorum. Consider procedures in place to cancel public meetings if necessary, as well as procedures to defer official action on non-essential matters, or providing remote access for meetings.

Also consider the processes for delegation of authority to alternate individuals in the event responsible persons are unavailable to perform their duties. Evaluate your current delegation of authority for things like signature authority, and the like, as well as ensuring that those commissioners with “vice” or other supporting roles are ready to assume a primary role if it becomes necessary. Ensure that meeting procedures are up-to-date, and spend time talking with officials about how the governing body would operate, as a practical matter, if one or more commissioners were unavailable to participate in deliberations. This discussion should expand to other elected officials—has the sheriff established a process to hand off duties should he or she be infected? The same questions must be considered, and plans must be put in place by the other elected officials.

Likewise, county leadership should think about ways to ensure that county department heads have designated alternates who are cross-trained and empowered with authorities to perform essential duties. Establish clear guidance on when and how alternates will be expected to assume direct responsibility for their areas of responsibility and clearly spell out expectations with regard to communicating with department heads and other managerial staff who may be working remotely or isolated at home.

From a day-to-day administrative standpoint, a primary focus area for county administrators should be on continuity of operations planning (COOP) within county government. Regardless of the impact of the pandemic, the county must exert its best efforts to continue comprehensive local government services to the community.

3: Conferences, Meetings and Business-Related Gatherings

Consider, where possible, canceling or adjusting non-essential in-person employee meetings and gatherings of 10 or more individuals. Work with staff to develop alternatives for conducting these meetings and use sound judgment, or established policies, when



determining which meetings are essential. Agencies should assess the need for conferences and large gatherings of 50 or more, and whether alternative accommodations can be made to mitigate exposure. If it is determined a conference is essential and cannot be delayed or conducted by other means, refer to local health authority guidance on strategies to mitigate exposure. Work with staff to develop alternatives for conducting these meetings to minimize risk, including the use of remote meeting technology. Finally, consult with legal counsel (D.A.) to ensure adherence to existing laws and regulations.

4: Direction Related to Travel

All business travel to impacted areas on the CDC list Warning Levels 3 and 2 is cancelled- click [here](#) to see CDC travel detail. Limit all non-essential business travel. Essential travel should be determined by the governing body. When determining what is essential travel you should consider several factors, including:

Is the travel related to the Agency Continuity of Operations?;

What is the destination and is it currently impacted?;

What is the mode of travel and does it involve movement through impacted areas described in the CDC link above?;

What is the mission, and does it take the person into a higher exposure situation (i.e. large conference)?;

Are there alternative methods that can still accomplish the mission (Video Conference, remote access)?

5: Guidance When Considering Office Closure

Decisions on office closure are to be made in consultation with the impacted elected official when possible. For offices housed with multiple agencies, impacted directors should coordinate with other agency, or department heads, prior to closure. In the event an office is significantly impacted but also carries out essential county functions, please ensure that you have a plan for continuity of operations, and consult with your DA. When determining whether to close an office please consider several factors, including:

Impact to the mission and public.

Risk to employees and public of remaining open.

Alternatives to continue effective operations (remote location, telecommuting).

Span of impacted area or potential for further contamination.

Impact of closure on employees and public.

Ability to conduct a partial closure of office.



6: How Should Our Organization Navigate Questions on Possible Exposure

The steps an organization should take when an employee reports a possible exposure to COVID-19 will depend upon the specific circumstances, yet employers are asked to err on the side of caution. When preparing for navigating issues related to exposure, please follow the steps below:

- First, get familiar with existing CDC risk assessment resources. These resources should be reviewed immediately, and shared widely within the organization, if possible. The first link provides details on the factors and customary CDC interventions an organization should take- click [here](#) to review the document. The second link is a decision matrix to help assess the appropriate employer interventions- click [here](#) to review the decision matrix. Information in these documents will assist with providing some detail on the factors and possible employer interventions.
- Second, consult with your local health jurisdiction to assess next steps. Access to state resources and contact information can be found [here](#).
- Third, based on the advice of the local public health jurisdiction (DPBH for rural counties), take appropriate action, if any. If the employee is directed to stay away from the workplace, take steps to determine if remote work is an option while the employee is away from the office and able to work. If the employee is unable to work remotely, explore leave options for the employee. Agencies should administer leave in accordance with the employee leave provisions of their applicable collective bargaining agreement or rules.

Note: If working with an employee confirmed to have COVID-19 infection, agencies should inform employees of their possible exposure in the workplace but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act and/or HIPAA.

7: Quarantine

Prior to taking any specific action regarding office closure, work restrictions, or quarantine, we urge you to consult with your health department staff/health officer/board of health and DA. The department may adopt and enforce quarantine or isolation measures to prevent the spread of communicable disease.

Additional information on Nevada-specific corona virus issues can be found at <http://dpbh.nv.gov/coronavirus/>

8: Messaging to the Community

County officials are important, trusted authorities within their local communities and will be asked for both official and conversational responses to this outbreak. Their comments and concerns will be immediately spread through a variety of mediums (including social media). It is important that the information provided be consistent, accurate and proactive.



Use updated talking points on the community’s posture with regard to the pandemic and its impacts, information about best practices for pandemic interventions (such as, at this time, social distancing and basic hygienic precautions), and clear guidance on how to amplify—not discredit—the messaging from state and national public health authorities.

Without accurate and timely information, elected officials may unintentionally contribute to more community confusion and unrest. Ensure that all elected officials have the same information and that all elected officials are encouraged to respond with the same information. To the extent possible the county should speak with ONE Voice for the duration of this event.

Here are some basic crisis communication tips:

Preparing your Team

1. Meet with your team. Include at least one person from:

- legal team
- PR staff
- expert on subject of the crisis (i.e. medical health professionals)

2. If you’re an appointed official, alert at least one of your elected officials. If you’re an elected official, brief your colleagues. Beware that anything you tell someone outside your crisis team may leak.

3. Have someone monitor social media and news coverage and give you updates.

Preparing the Message

1. Determine three major points. Avoid jargon. Each point must:

- be true
- show your compassion
- show that you’re gathering information and want a solution

2. If you have little or conflicting information, use “general responses” until facts are clear.



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Begin Communicating

1. Write a short statement (100 words or less) and have the crisis team review it. Post it on social media and send it to local news media, noting who the statement is from.
2. Tell reporters to follow your social media feed for updated information. Update the feed accordingly.
3. If media are gathering, prepare a briefing area. Plan for visuals. Use the expertise of your public health officials or trusted medical professionals, who should be taking the lead in communicating the medical facts about the outbreak. If you take questions, limit answers to what is known and promise to provide more information as it is confirmed.