

Subject: COVID-19 Agency Update: March 19, 2020

Date: Thursday, March 19, 2020 at 5:00:39 PM Central Daylight Time

From: Blair L. Fannin

To: All Extension Employees

SENT ON BEHALF OF Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Director Dr. Jeff Hyde

Extension colleagues,

We continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation and are giving careful consideration to how we maintain business operations moving forward. We appreciate your focus and commitment. Today, Gov. Greg Abbott announced a statewide public health disaster for the first time in Texas since 1901.

An executive order will begin Friday, March 20, through April 3 requiring all Texas schools, bars, gyms and restaurant dining rooms to temporarily close. This is not a shelter in place.

- Individuals must avoid social gatherings that have more than 10 people.

Only essential employees are available to work on site, and employees should practice best hygiene and nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPIs).

Given the current set of challenges, there will be changes to the way we conduct operations statewide. Programming is transitioning to online delivery and more details will be sent out Friday. In the meantime, please see the following updates:

Staffing

Based on direction from Chancellor Sharp, on-site skeleton crew staffing in College Station will continue **until May 1**. If the situation changes before May 1, the A&M System will rescind or revise its guidance. County offices should follow the guidance from their county, but employees should contact their immediate supervisor with concerns about safety and personal situations which may be covered in the section below.

Remote work and emergency leave

Implementation of temporary alternate work location arrangements continues in accordance with System Regulation [33.06.01](#). This may involve work that is outside the employee's primary responsibilities. Based on this strong guidance to work from home, managers are empowered to modify employee expectations, and find tasks employees are capable of completing remotely.

This time should be used for TexasData reporting, developing online resources for delivery, professional development and other work tasks outside the normal work routine. We are working on a more extensive list to share, but please consult with your supervisor or program leadership.

If remote work is not possible for employees otherwise able to work but are not able to report to their normal work location, emergency leave is then recommended in accordance with System Regulation [31.03.03](#), section 2.5.2.

This may also apply to employees who are unable to report to their normal work location because of the need to care for dependent children where schools have cancelled classes. Please note, it is preferred that emergency leave be reserved for those who cannot work from home. Emergency leave requests must be approved by the agency director or designee prior to being submitted in Workday. Emergency leave requests in Workday should be entered as "Other Emergencies" with a comment indicating leave due to COVID-19.

Travel

Travel restrictions continue to be in place. The A&M System discourages travel between campuses and outside locations. Other key travel guidance for Extension employees:

- As you all are aware, there were additional travel restrictions that came out from the Vice Chancellor on 3.18.20. Because of these restrictions, AgriLife is now making it mandatory to submit a travel request through Concur before any travel begins. These requests must route through Risk and Compliance, but you must manually add Debi Fincher to the approval. [This process does NOT relate to county-based faculty whose travel is paid by the county.](#)
- Mission critical travel, both domestic and in-state, should be reported through the Office of Ethics & Compliance with final approval by the Agency CEO or designee.
- County-assigned staff are advised to stay within the county only; follow travel approval in accordance with the County Judge.
- No international travel is permitted through May 31st; this date will be revisited and may be extended.
- No domestic air travel, exclusive of Texas, is permitted unless deemed mission critical, through May 31st; this date will be revisited and may be extended.
- In addition, System discourages travel between TAMUS campuses and locations until further notice.

Domestic Travel:

- Domestic travelers are required only to self-monitor at this time.
- Domestic travelers do NOT need to self-isolate unless feeling ill or in a household with someone ill.
- Guidance for self-monitoring is found here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/risk-assessment.html>

International Travel:

- Given ongoing developments in COVID-19 transmission in recent days, any faculty, staff or students returning from international travel from any country (including cruises) and through any airport, effective immediately, must self-isolate for 14 days before returning to a System campus or work location.
- Guidance for self-isolating is found here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/risk-assessment.html>

In addition, CDC now recommends that travelers defer all cruise travel worldwide. Cruise travelers should stay home for 14 days after returning from travel, monitor their health, and practice social distancing.

Please continue to check the CDC website as these recommendations may evolve: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

Performance Evaluations/New Employees/Onboarding

- Managers are encouraged to conduct performance review meetings using technology rather than face-to-face. Evaluations will be completed on the appropriate form and uploaded into Workday and routed for signatures by manager and employee between April 1 and May 31.
- If a unit/program has a final candidate and is ready to make an offer, communicate your intentions to the candidate and, if possible, set a start date on or after May 1. Given the fluidity of the situation, all start dates may have to be adjusted to ensure each person's safety concerns as well as availability of staff. All recruiting activity currently in process that has not resulted in an offer by Friday, March 20, 2020, should be delayed until further notice.
- County based candidate interviews and screenings should be conducted through distance technology. Procedures for court approval will be at the discretion of the County Judge.
- The new Extension Employee Orientation scheduled for the week of April 13-17 will transition to

online. Look for more information on this soon.

Social Media

Ag Communications has developed a [Social Media plan](#) to share COVID-19 messaging and resources. Follow the agency social media channels at:

[AgriLife Extension Twitter](#): @txextension

[AgriLife Extension Facebook](#): @agrilifeextension

[AgriLife Extension Instagram](#): @txextension

By sharing these through your own accounts, you will help us reach a broad audience and help raise the visibility of the AgriLife Extension brand.

REMINDERS, TRAININGS:

Trainings have already begun this week utilizing both Teams and Zoom conferencing platforms. Many of you will be evaluating programming options to determine if curriculum can be offered online. The following digital resources are available to offer upcoming programs at a distance:

- **WebEx:** AgriLife Extension has access to [WebEx for online program delivery in counties and regions](#).
- **Zoom:** Campus-based delivery options are available through Zoom (for non-agents). Online training will be held Monday-Wednesday-Friday through May 1 at 11 a.m. To join: <https://agrilife.zoom.us/j/400857546>
- **Teams:** Teams can be accessed via the TEAMS application on your work laptop or via a web browser on your home computer by going to <https://teams.office.com> and logging in with your AgNet credentials (firstname.lastname@AGNET.tamu.edu). For how-to guides and overview on how to utilize features such as web conferencing, chat, file sharing and other features of TEAMS please go to: <https://firstcallhelp.tamu.edu/whats-new/teams/>.

The following Teams trainings have been set up for agents and specialists. Center-based specialists can join the training based upon the region in which they are located, while campus-based specialists can join the West Region session.

- Friday, March 20th at 10:00 am: North Region-[Join Microsoft Teams Meeting](#)
- Friday, March 20th at 2:00 pm: Central Region-[Join Microsoft Teams Meeting](#)

For further COVID-19 information, visit [Texas EDEN](#) or [CDC](#) websites.

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