State of Vermont
Agency of Administration
Office of the Secretary
Pavilion Office Building
109 State Street, 5th Floor
Montpelier, VT 05609-0201
www.aoa.vermont.gov

[phone] 802-828-3322
[fax] 802-828-3320

Susanne R. Young, Secretary

TO:	Appointing Authorities, Elected Officials and State Employees
CC:	Judicial and Legislative Branches
FROM:	Susanne R. Young, Secretary of Administration
DATE:	March 1, 2021
SUBJECT:	Remote Work for State Employees Extended to May 31, 2021

Susanne R. Young
Digitally signed by Susanne R. Young
Date: 2021.03.01 15:05:14 -05'00'

Background

Appointing authorities and State employees were informed on October 30, 2020 that they should expect to work remotely when able to do so until at least March 31, 2021 due to the pandemic. The Administration advised that additional information would be provided to the state workforce by March 1, 2021.

In October, Vermont was experiencing an increase in COVID-19 infections and outbreaks traced back to social gatherings during a season when we were collectively moving indoors. School re-openings were, and continue to be, successful and it remains true that part of that success has been the flexibility provided to schools and families to shift to in-person and/or remote learning schedules as needed. Maintaining a telework status allowed us to maintain heightened efforts to suppress the virus while we awaited the roll out of a vaccine.

Since the availability of approved vaccines, vaccinations to date have rolled out very quickly in Vermont. So long as vaccine supply is available, the Agency of Human Services expects to be substantially completed with the high-risk population (those 65+ and with certain underlying health conditions) in mid-April. By then, we may have as many as 1 in 3 Vermonters vaccinated and details of the next steps in the vaccination plan will be available.

On February 19, 2021, the Governor updated the state's travel quarantine policy, a decision supported by the best available science and made possible by the positive impact mitigation measures and vaccines have had in reducing risk to those who are most vulnerable to hospitalization or death. There is great optimism that gathering and cross state travel restrictions will be further loosened this spring or summer.

Remote Work: Current Status

Current conditions warrant the extension of telework for those able to do so until May 31, 2021. It is important to note, however, that there are opportunities for those who want to return to the worksite earlier to

do so. The guidance from the Vermont Department of Human Resources (DHR) from August 6, 2020 is still effective and should be utilized by employees who would like to request their appointing authority's approval to return to the workplace.

Appointing authorities should be thinking now about what a phased return to work may look like, because we anticipate being in a position to increase in-person work in the months ahead. They currently have the discretion to approve requests from employees to return to the worksite using the criteria in the guidance, which include when more than 25% of job duties require a return to an office setting, home internet speeds or other connectivity issues are insufficient to support full execution of job duties, and home office ergonomics or other conditions in the home environment are unsuitable for full-time work, in that priority.

Due to improving conditions, beginning April 1, 2021, appointing authorities may approve requests from employees to return to work based on employee preference and/or operational improvement needs. Appointing Authorities must refer to the Department of Building & General Services (BGS) Return to Work Guidance and worksite protocols when considering any request to return to the worksite and engage BGS as needed to prepare the worksite before employees return.

Any employee in the workplace must abide by all health and safety measures and protocols, including completion of daily health surveys, wearing masks, avoiding in-person meetings or congregating in break rooms or other spaces, and frequent handwashing.

Remote Work: Future Considerations

The Administration is considering what changes could be made to our pre-pandemic remote work policies. This is a complex decision that will take some time and further research in the next few months. Deploying the December 2020 telework survey was one step taken to learn about employee experiences during the pandemic. The time and attention so many spent on responding to the survey is remarkable and appreciated as 59%, or 4,730 State employees completed the "Workforce Employee Experience Survey" in December.

The survey results are now available on the DHR website and will help inform decisions on how to accommodate employees' interest in some form of telework in the future, in a way that achieves measurable and consistent productivity in the delivery of services to Vermonters post-pandemic. Generally speaking, we do expect to continue to provide some measure of flexibility in work schedules. However, the survey also reaffirms that full-time remote work is not ideal for many, which is why we continue to offer employees the opportunity to request to return to the worksite as outlined above.

In addition, we recognize that many employees are not able to telework due to the nature of their job, and we know their work environments have also changed dramatically since the onset of the pandemic. Many of these employees took the survey as well, and it is important that we also learn from their experiences going forward.

What to Expect Next

State employees should continue to monitor the daily e-mails from the Department of Human Resources that provide updates from the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) and refer to both the VDH and

Agency of Commerce & Community Development websites for updated travel guidance and other easing of restrictions as they develop over the next weeks and months.

Expect an update on when employees can expect to be advised to return to the worksite on or before May 15, 2020, as well as an update on the status of the State's current remote work policy.

Until then, thank you to everyone for your continued adherence to the health and safety guidance during these next critical months of administering vaccines - first to those Vermonters who are most at risk of hospitalization or death from COVID-19 - and soon to every Vermonter.

###