

May 15, 2020

Dear Faculty and Staff Colleagues:

Over the last week, Governor Lamont announced a plan would allow various sectors of the Connecticut economy to address reopening gradually, in phases and with guidance. I am writing today to update you on our current workplace and return to work guidance and pay practices while internal planning continues for restarting operations across our campuses. Though lengthy, this communication contains information that all of us, as Huskies, need to know.

**Telecommuting Employees:** *Importantly and for the time being, everyone who has been working remotely should continue to do so until the President announces any changes to the University's current operating status. If that were to occur, guidance will be provided and your manager will inform you when you should return to the campus or your work location.* At Storrs and our regional campuses, we expect more will be known by June 30<sup>th</sup> as outlined by President Katsouleas last week. Dr. Andy Agwunobi will continue to communicate with our valued colleagues at UConn Health and note that UConn Health employees may be returned to work sites sooner than other areas of our campuses state-wide.

**On-site Critical Employees:** We continue to be grateful for the exceptional efforts of those of our employees deemed critical to the mission of the University and who have remained on our campuses and health center since the middle of March. *All these activities, including Facilities Operations, will continue* and we remain deeply appreciative of the professionalism, civility and dedication that is being exhibited across the university on a daily basis as we all continue to adjust to these challenging times.

**Research Employees:** *We fully understand the critical importance of safely resuming research and other scholarly work and consistent with the Governor's directive it was previously announced that Research would ramp up in a phased process beginning on May 20<sup>th</sup>. As a phased process, there is no requirement nor expectation that all research will resume on this date.* The OVPR process requires all PIs to complete a template that includes their plan for following CDC and other safety guidelines as well as COVID-19 specific training. Approval of the plan by the OVPR is required before labs can reopen and previously halted research activities can resume.

Toward that end, and as previously announced, Vice President for Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Radenka Maric and her team is leading the effort to safely resume our research programs and related research operations. In partnership with different units including Environmental Health and Safety, guidelines, safety plans, training and cleaning protocols have been developed that can be used by principal investigators, as well as departments, centers/institutes and colleges/schools to begin planning for the ramp up of research activity. Guidance on the phased ramp up research for UConn and UConn Health is available on the OVPR website ([ovpr.uconn.edu](http://ovpr.uconn.edu)).

**Pay Guidance:** *Until June 30th, in circumstances in which a manager has no available work or no full-time work for an employee to complete remotely, the supervisor will approve continuing pay for the employee at their current rate of pay and regular scheduled hours/effort, without requiring the use of vacation, sick and/or health and personal leave accruals* along with the following understanding: a) The same would apply to regular payroll employees paid on sponsored projects, b) Graduate Assistants with Spring Semester appointments who cannot work a full pay period due to lack of work will continue to be paid through the end of their spring semester contracts, c) Summer Graduate Assistant appointments will be issued in accordance with the collective bargaining agreement and d) Special Payroll employees who are able to continue working with approval of managers will be paid for hours worked and in accordance with their appointment terms or employment agreement.

## **Guidance for Managers and Supervisors:**

- **Remote Work** – Except for employees “deemed” critical (on-site) and research employees that may be cleared for work on and after May 20, 2020 by their manager or principal investigator, ALL employees currently telecommuting ARE REQUIRED to continue to telecommute and managers and supervisors are not permitted to alter those terms regarding return to work of their direct reports without the expressed approval of University executive leadership. Separate announcements will be made at UConn Health.

- **On-campus Services**

UConn is a continuously operating university and some employees must work on campuses to provide services that are critical to residential life, campus health and safety, to conduct and support research, healthcare and/or other core missions of the University. UConn and UConn Health will continue to follow CDC, state and other federal guidance to ensure a safe work environment including social distancing practices, flexible work schedules, enhanced cleaning and disinfecting protocols, safety training and other measures and practices. If you are unclear if you are to report to work on-site, contact your supervisor.

- **Work Flexibility**

We encourage managers and employees to explore the boundaries of flexibility and creativity in allowing as many employees to telecommute as possible, particularly with regard to requests involving comorbidity factors of themselves or those living in their households and those employees over the age of 65. During the workweek, allow employees to flex schedule their work within reasonable core hours so that they may juggle the demands of working at home, caring for their families and children while ensuring the work is completed timely and well. Ensure your staff have the necessary equipment and supplies to address the required work within reason. Flexible work hours should be explored for those employees that have been cleared to work on or after May 20, 2020 to ensure adequate social distancing within the work space.

- **Employee Attendance**

Managers and supervisors must not pressure employees or others to come to work if they are ill. If an employee is cleared to report to work, a manager may send an employee home if they are concerned about the appropriateness of the employee being in the workplace. Employees are asked to cooperate with managers who are taking on this uncomfortable responsibility for community well-being. If you are sick or aren't feeling well, the most important thing is for you to take care of yourself so that you feel better and stay away from others so that your illness doesn't spread.

Employees who are caregivers for a sick family member are to exercise caution and stay home if possible and with the approval of their manager. Conversely, if employees who have been told to report to work are well, they should not be pressured to stay away from work.

Exempt and non-exempt employees that are benefits eligible and who are scheduled to return to the work-site by their manager, and who believe that they may have a documented condition which puts them at greater risk even with the safety protocols put into place, may request to review individual needs with their department in conjunction with human resources current leave processes.

Know that not all approvals of leave or the use of accrued time or unpaid leave can be granted to maintain the sustainability of the University's mission, but we ask that all approaches be considered by managers before the employee is required to return to work.

The University is reviewing the issues surrounding employees caring for children at home when schools are closed against the availability of available child care and the possibility of accommodation within existing leave and flexible policies.

## Redeployment

Next week, the University will be socializing and introducing a new Employee Sharing Program with union leadership and then with our colleagues across the state. If there is a lack of work for a current positions, managers and staff employees will be asked/directed to register eligible employees for the temporary redeployment pool and accept redeployment where offered.

## Safety

Faculty and staff may have concerns about measures that may need to be taken by UConn in the event of even more widespread local, regional or national transmission of COVID-19. The university has extensive and thorough emergency procedures and is committed to doing everything it can to ensure the health and safety of our community. Because this is a rapidly changing situation, UConn has and will continue to prepare for and enact a range of preventative measures based on guidance from state and local health officials to protect public health.

### ➤ **What Should Employees Do Now?**

1. Unless specifically told by your manager or principal investigator to be on any campus or work-site, you should not return unless scheduled to do so by your manager.
2. Follow procedures for social distancing and keep apart from other employees by at least 6 feet both on and off the work-site for your own protection, your loved ones, society and our UConn community.
3. Using prior guidance and Executive Order of the Governor, wear *face mask/coverings*. If you do not have a face mask or covering, contact your manager or call the UConn Warehouse to obtain one.
4. Follow all CDC everyday preventive actions to prevent community transmission.
5. If you are a returning Research colleague, follow all instructions for safe return to your work-site and adhere to them daily and without fail. You will receive more information in the days ahead on the new procedures.

These are trying times. I recognize that leaving campus with uncertainty is stressful and having a definitive timeline for returning to work on campus and/or our prior ways of working would provide assurances for us all. But that is not something we can provide at this time. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we continue to navigate this evolving situation and to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19.

As stated in my letter of April 24<sup>th</sup> and which I will emphasize again, your individual and collective support for each other, sense of community and demonstration of the human spirit continues to inspire us. The enormity of the challenges we are all facing continues, but I am proud to say that I know UConn and UConn Health will continue to face those challenges as we always do – together, and only together will we be able to bring our campuses back to life again. I ask all of us to continue to expand on the courage, civility and compassion this crisis calls for.

Please be sure to check for changes to the university operating status at (<https://uconn.edu/public-notification/coronavirus/>) the definitive source for timely information about UConn's operating plans and response to the coronavirus.

Sincerely,

Christopher Delello  
Chief Human Resources Officer, UConn and UConn Health