

23 July 2020

Dear Government, Business and Nonprofit Sector Leaders:

Reopening in Phase Three began in Virginia, including Arlington, on July 1, 2020. While we may appreciate the sense of “normalcy” a potential return to the workplace represents, we must remind you that COVID-19 has not gone away. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic affecting our world is still here in the Washington, DC metro area, including Arlington. While there has been a decline in our cases and hospitalizations since May/June, there is ongoing community wide spread of COVID-19, and recent trends show our numbers at a plateau, not decline.

Given the increase in cases and hospitalizations following reopening elsewhere across the United States, we remind you as government, business, and non-profit leaders to remain vigilant and protect your employees and clients by continuing to offer telework if possible. This protects our residents and our communities in Arlington and the Washington, DC metro area from non-essential work contact and therefore reducing the chances of COVID-19 spread at your workplaces.

If in-office work is deemed essential, the Governor’s Forward Virginia public health requirements remain in place:

- Maintain at least six-foot distances between employees and clients alike. Physical distancing is the most effective way to reduce/eliminate germ spread between people.
- Wear cloth face coverings anywhere other than individual work stations (presuming the seating at stations is six feet apart). This includes in conference rooms and other common areas.
- Limit time spent at under six feet between employees cumulatively to under 15 minutes.
- Explore alternatives to prevent employees from working within six feet of each other.
- Provide for cleaning and disinfection per Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations.
- Emphasize personal hygiene habits at the office and at home:
 - Wash hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds. Use hand sanitizer when soap and water is not available.
 - Cover coughs and sneezes with a sleeve or tissue. Wash hands as above after using a tissue.
 - Stay home when ill – this allows employees and clients to rest and recover, and also prevents spreading germs at the workplace.
 - Get a flu shot when available – you don’t want your employees to get the flu, let alone both flu and COVID-19.

You can find the specific details governing your sector in the link to Forward Virginia Phase Three: <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/governor-of-virginia/pdf/Forward-Virginia-Phase-Three-Guidelines.pdf>.

You can find additional information about how businesses and workplaces can plan, prepare and respond to COVID-19 at CDC's website: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/businesses-employers.html.

With reopening comes the risk of germ spread in your business, which may require a public health disease investigation. Should we have to conduct an investigation related to a case of COVID-19 at your worksite, the Virginia Department of Health and Arlington County Public Health Division use the CDC standard definition of close contact, i.e., being within six feet of a person with COVID-19 for 15 minutes or more regardless of the use of a cloth face covering. If we determine that a person has been within six feet of a COVID-19 case for 15 minutes or longer, we consider the person to be a close contact. We ask close contacts to stay at home and quarantine for 14 days. These additional quarantines that result from unnecessary germ exposure have affected employee health and well-being as well as business operations, driving some to shut down operations once again.

Without careful attention to public health recommendations above, unnecessary germ exposure makes it more likely that we have to revert to a previous Forward Virginia phase.

We need your leadership to reopen responsibly where necessary and to continue to ensure the health and safety of our workforce and employees. Following these public health requirements is vital to protect your workforce and to avoid business shutdowns. Working together, we can safeguard employees, clients, residents and communities in the Washington, D.C. metro area, including Arlington, from COVID-19 spread.

Finally, if your operations do require you to be onsite, we encourage you to become a "We Are Covered" certified business. A "We Are Covered" certification means a business or residence has pledged to protect people by actively participating in this important face covering requirement. Display your badge on your door or window to let workers, customers, and passersby know you prioritize their health. Let's make Arlington fully covered.

You can learn more about the "We Are Covered" program and other Arlington COVID-19 related information on our website -- www.arlingtonva.us/covid-19/ -- or by calling our information line at 703- 228-7999.

Sincerely,

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