



From the Desk of the Director: COVID-19 Update

Dear colleagues,

Today, Governor Raimondo and Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Health, announced that there are 54 positive cases of COVID-19 in Rhode Island. While the Department of Administration has not received confirmation of any positive cases in the core Executive Branch, I want you to know that we are prepared for such a scenario and have been planning for weeks to ensure employees can be safe while State government continues its obligation to deliver essential basic services to thousands of Rhode Islanders in their time of need.

We recognize that as the number of cases increases, so can personal stress and anxiety. There are a host of resources available for you and your family, including our free [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\) \[r20.rs6.net\]](https://www.r20.rs6.net). Another resource is [Behavioral Health Link \[r20.rs6.net\]](https://www.r20.rs6.net), a one-stop, statewide 24/7 call-in center that provides confidential support for people experiencing mental health crises. Take advantage of these resources if you need them. There is nothing wrong with asking for help.

We also recently issued guidelines around increased flexibility in the State's teleworking and sick time policies, and we hope you take advantage of those opportunities if you can. For others, just know that during a time when Rhode Islanders need you the most, it is nothing short of heroic that you have continued to step up to the plate. I know it is not easy. On a daily basis, Rhode Island's workforce – including our own – is dealing with multiple challenges: child care, virtual learning for their kids, new technology, and fear of the unknown. The leaders of our agencies are grappling with these challenges, too.

The best way to get through this together is to communicate with each other responsibly. It is with that in mind that I ask each of you to be mindful of the following in the coming days and weeks:

Rumors are dangerous. Please don't spread them. Should someone who works closely with you test positive for COVID-19, you will be directly notified that you need to quarantine by the Rhode Island Department of Health and/or your agency supervisor/Director. We recognize how difficult it is to ignore rumors when there is heightened concern for health and safety, but we need you to help us fight the spread of misinformation.

We must abide by patient confidentiality laws. Please respect the privacy of your colleagues. Patient confidentiality must be protected, as people have rights to their own privacy. While we will abide by the law, we recognize that this does not alleviate anxiety for employees. However, it's important for you to know that the contact tracing process is designed to protect other people who have been exposed while keeping patient confidentiality. This means this type of information is not shared with those who are not affected or at risk.

Be kind to your colleagues. The State of Rhode Island has standards for professional conduct, and we expect those standards to be met even in the worst of times. Be extra kind to your fellow employee, who may be privately experiencing difficult personal and professional challenges. In the face of this public health crisis, we have begun to see Rhode Islanders and businesses band together to help each other. I'm hopeful that we can continue in that spirit during these difficult times.

Do not panic. Every day, we are learning new things about COVID-19 and are taking proactive steps to mitigate the spread of this virus. The State will continue to send frequent communications and provide you with the most up-to-date information about the actions we're taking to protect you and members of the public.

Thank you for your patience, and we will be in touch again soon.

Sincerely,



Brett Smiley
Director
R.I. Department of Administration