

CODE AND COMMITMENTS

PRINCIPLES FOR SUPERVISORS

NOTIFYING EMPLOYEES OF COVID-19 EXPOSURE

Each day Forest Service supervisors make decisions and interact with employees and others based on our [Code and Commitments](#). During the COVID-19 Global Pandemic, the principles that form the foundation of the code and commitments are essential to navigating through this together. Fear, worry, anxiety, irritability, and blame are natural responses to a world and job that so suddenly became abnormal. Modeling our code and commitments to employees in difficult times can provide support to them and bolster their emotional and physical well-being.

As the virus spreads, it is affecting more and more communities that are home to many Forest Service units. Employees often do not have access to testing or appropriate personal protective equipment. As the issuance of emergency mandates increases, employees worry that their family or co-workers will become sick or die from Covid-19. Many employees will be impacted by grief that comes from death and disruption of life. The [USDA COVID-19 Playbook](#) defines necessary steps to take when an employee is diagnosed or exposed to COVID-19, and includes a suggested script to use when interviewing the affected employee. The principles in this document complement the Playbook by considering the human element - the importance of considering the impact notifications could have on the mental health of employees and their families.

In times when it is necessary to deliver potentially distressing news, we will **Treat Everyone with Respect, Empower One Another, Invest in Relationships, Model Integrity, Protect One Another and Learn from Mistakes**.

ASSISTING EMPLOYEES EXPOSED TO COVID-19

- ✓ Quickly assign a care liaison to the employee to provide ongoing information and support. Consider someone who is empathetic, patient & flexible, respectful, and trustworthy. Ensure the care liaison will maintain appropriate and agreed upon confidentiality. Care includes maintaining regular contact with the employee, listening, answering questions, and assisting with completion of administrative paperwork and procedures (e.g., Time & Attendance).
- ✓ Notify the employee verbally of the process you will follow for reporting the exposure. Alert them that employees, partners or members of the public they may have been in contact with will be notified of their possible exposure while maintaining their anonymity. This allows self-monitoring to begin in order to slow the spread.
- ✓ Provide employee with written copy of process to review as needed. Clarify with employee who needs to be notified, ensuring confidentiality will be maintained throughout the process.
- ✓ Express empathy, compassion, and genuine care., Acknowledge the employee's thoughts and feelings, without judgment or the urge to fix it.
- ✓ If the employee is hospitalized, consider assigning a trained Hospital Liaison for employee and family support. Recognize that this role could be very different due to the contagion.

- ✓ Provide support through accurate information and guidance to the [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\) as needed.](#)

NOTIFYING COWORKERS OF EMPLOYEE COVID-19 EXPOSURE

- ✓ Within 24 hours of learning of the exposure, notify any coworkers, partners or the public that the employee has been in contact with during the course of their Forest Service duties while safeguarding the privacy of the affected employee.
- ✓ Protect the affected employee's personally identifiable information (PII) as outlined by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) (Privacy Rule). Learn more about this [here](#).
- ✓ Recognize that news of an affected, anonymous coworker may invoke fear among coworkers; reassurance and clear protocol will be essential. Employees may erroneously identify the affected person; provide timely support and information to dispel rumors and prevent misinformation. Be prepared to provide support for these employees via the [Employee Assistance Program](#).
- ✓ Use the simplest, most available option for notifying coworkers directly while abiding by all emergency safety mandates, including social distancing. Use platforms like Teams, Skype, Adobe Connect or employee call to limit risk to employees.
- ✓ Provide pertinent information to coworkers before informing a broader audience.
- ✓ The Forest Supervisor or Regional Forester should notify all employees of an exposure to:
 - Allow them to determine a course of action that emphasizes their personal safety
 - Share information on steps that will be taken to adhere to CDC guidelines regarding deep cleaning and employee safety.
 - Provide support through empathy, accurate information and guidance to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Resources are available for supervisors and employees on the [Casualty Assistance Program](#) website.