



A Message from Chuck Rettig

IRS Commissioner



I want to update you on some developments in this very rapidly changing environment. I'm incredibly proud of you and your efforts to continue our important and critical work while we navigate through many different challenges in this quickly evolving situation.

Although not visible to many of you, there are many, many people working long hours to help our employees. As a federal agency vital to the overall operations of our country at this difficult time, we are unfortunately not able to simply shut down our operations. We are required to operate within certain authorities and guidance, and we have expanded to the edges of this ever-changing situation, both locally and nationally. FMSS has people onsite who are exercising their best efforts on your behalf. We have been working hard to change our operations to accommodate our mutual concerns, while also acknowledging our responsibility to our country.

We've recently been provided a wealth of flexibilities by OPM, OMB and the Department of Treasury that allow us to continue our mission-critical functions while beginning to scale down certain other operations. These functions would not be significantly impacted by a temporary onsite downsizing, rotating hours and schedules, expanded telework opportunities for some who were not otherwise eligible, expanding opportunities for weather and safety leave in certain impacted locations, closing public-facing operations within certain functions and so on – all to promote greater social distancing.

New steps to rescope operations to help you

We're taking several immediate steps to protect employees while still delivering on the mission-critical functions. These include:

- Ending walk-in and in-person appointments with taxpayers at our Taxpayer Assistance Centers, protecting both taxpayers and our employees. Walk-in services with the Taxpayer Advocate Service have also ended, though phone operations continue.
- To maintain critical operations, all employees who are telework eligible are requested to work outside their office setting.
- For mission-critical operations that require people to be in a campus or work setting, we will be immediately reducing staffing by approximately 50 percent to enhance social distancing.
- Where appropriate, employees who are not telework eligible will be placed on Weather and Safety leave.
- These guidelines will be reassessed on April 4, and we will continue to monitor developments around the clock.
- In addition, a number of our offices and facilities in high-impact areas are closed, and we continue to work with federal, state and local authorities on these issues.

More specifics on these steps will be coming from your business unit leaders and your manager.

How to stay up to date

We also urge you to check our IRS Source COVID-19 Resource page regularly; this page is being updated on a daily basis. Another great resource will be the IRS.gov employee emergency page. This is accessible on our external website and will include important updates as well. If you haven't done so yet, I urge you to sign up for AtHoc, our primary emergency notification system, which alerts you in real-time to critical IRS information via your personal device and/or email during an emergency.

Telework to increase social distancing

We have maximized telework flexibilities to all current telework-eligible employees, consistent with the operational needs of the agency. We are using all existing authorities to offer telework to additional employees, to the extent their work could be telework enabled. Where we can, we are moving laptops into impacted areas to be prepared for a possible expansion of telework opportunities. We are pushing to do everything we can for expansions of guidance to assist you and your families -- and will continue to do so.

Leave flexibility for those who need it

We also know that there are individuals who are at high risk or in special populations (as defined by the CDC) and need to take additional measures to protect themselves. Employees who are not in key functions who are not telework eligible will be placed on Weather and Safety leave. Please work with your manager if you fall in this category.

Keeping our facilities clean

Across the nation, our facilities teams have been working hard under difficult circumstances to keep our facilities stocked with sanitizer and other cleaning supplies to the best of their ability. Please be assured we are doing our best to acquire more in a market that is in extremely short supply. In the absence of hand sanitizer, you should wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Please continue to follow the CDC guidance about COVID-19 to prevent illness and recognize symptoms. If not feeling well, stay home, or go home immediately if you are at work, and call your health care provider for medical advice. As soon as you are able, contact your manager.

Additional resources available

We know this outbreak may be stressful to you and your families. It may be difficult to cope with the fear and anxiety about this, particularly when there is uncertainty. We need to fulfill our critical mission and know we will continue to receive the best efforts from many of you in these most uncertain times. There are resources to help:

- HCO has a special webinar and slides available called "Coping with Uncertainty About the Coronavirus" on the IRS Source [COVID-19 Resource page](#).
- I encourage you to visit the [CDC Coronavirus webpage](#), which includes information and resources to cope with this stress and ensure your mental health.

- The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available to help you cope with any stress or anxiety you may have concerning the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 Resource page has answers to many questions; check there first

We ask for your patience as we work through these very complicated issues that affect many different aspects of the agency. I want you to know that we will be frequently communicating and adding new information and resources. Please continue to stay up to date via the COVID-19 Resource page on IRS Source. We are frequently updating this page with new information; many of the employee questions we're seeing are addressed there.

Turn to each other, help each other, respect each other

Throughout my life, I've seen the power that each person can make to others. This is a time unlike any other we've faced, and I ask that each of you work together, help each other – whether at work, at home or whatever setting you find yourself in. I've met thousands of you, and we need your spirit of working together right now more than ever.

Last year, during the lapse, various food banks around the country supported our employees in various ways. During this difficult time, if you have the ability, please support the food banks in your local community as well as other community services and activities. And please watch out for your family, friends and neighbors. If you reside in an area with a homeless population, a bit of help presently would be much appreciated - with many restaurant closings, their ability to receive assistance is diminished. For everyone, even a smile or an affirmative head nod can have a positive impact on others in these trying times.

These are challenging times, and I ask for your personal support, your understanding – and your patience – as we navigate this difficult period. If I had the ability to somehow do so, I would do all I could to have this virus immediately disappear – I feel the concern of everyone. With your help, we will get through this, and once again rise to yet another challenge. We certainly didn't seek out this challenge and certainly not at the peak of filing season 2020, but know that ultimately there are thousands and thousands of beautiful sunsets ahead. We are one, we are strong – working to protect you while together we continue protecting the nation!

--Chuck