



## MESSAGE FROM THE DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR

This email message is being sent to EPA employees.

Dear Colleagues,

I hope you and your families and loved ones are staying safe and healthy this summer. There is nothing more important than that as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and the new challenges posed by the Delta variant. I am grateful to work at this agency where I know we continue to serve our mission while ensuring the health and safety of each other and our communities.

Right up front, I want to acknowledge that our country is still experiencing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Please know that I fully understand how much our current situation impacts decisions about your family and personal lives, including children returning to school and care for vulnerable family members. You have my commitment to keep you updated about our plans, so this is the first of what I plan to be regular communications to you.

### **No Sooner Than Date and Notice to Employees**

In mid-July, the agency projected a “no-sooner-than” date of November 7, 2021, as the earliest possible date that we could begin to initiate our safe, increased return to the physical workplace (for those who have not yet done so). Please keep in mind that we identified the November 7, 2021, date before the resurgence of COVID-19 cases we are currently experiencing. We are watching the data and any date for a return to EPA offices will take into account real world conditions, so this date could be after November 7 and will not change to an earlier date. EPA is taking the utmost care to ensure we are ready for this transition. Our planning and decisions are always guided by science and your safety and many issues are still being thought through and need to be discussed with our union partners.

Our projected November date was based on the time we believe is needed to allow for us to work with our union partners, meet the agency's bargaining obligations and thoughtfully develop the policies and procedures necessary to support the Future of Work at EPA, building greater flexibility into our policies. We will provide you with a **notice period of at least 45 calendar days before the return date**, which is no sooner than November 7, 2021, but subject to consideration of current conditions.

## **CDC Vaccination and Masking Guidance**

Since the submission of our framework, the CDC announced [updated mask guidance](#) for vaccinated individuals. That includes that all persons wear masks in facilities in areas of [substantial or high transmission](#), as designated by the CDC. We are also working to implement the vaccination attestation and testing requirements as [announced by the President](#), which require every Federal employee and onsite contractor to attest to their vaccination status. If you are not yet vaccinated, I urge you to visit [www.vaccines.gov](http://www.vaccines.gov) to find a vaccination location near you.

We are all concerned about the resurgence of the virus and the Delta variant. I am encouraged to see that this concern is reflected in the guidance provided in the task force's updated [Agency Model Safety Principles](#), which will inform the updates to our Workplace Safety Plan. The principles are aligned with the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) based on the evolving understanding of the pandemic. The principles outline a number of requirements for non-fully-vaccinated federal employees and onsite contractors, workplace operations, and in-person meetings. As new guidance comes out, we will let you know promptly what it means for EPA's day-to-day work.

## **Future of Work**

We are actively working on the development and implementation of effective post-reentry personnel and work environment policies. This is informed by our [Future of Work](#) survey results and the 184 listening sessions held with staff, supervisors, and our union partners. You urged us to maximize flexibility and make sure that employees had sufficient time for any changes. You made specific suggestions about how we can learn from this experience. We listened. We intend to provide adequate time to transition to the physical workplace and allow the agency the time needed to develop a flexible approach to EPA's Future of Work.

During this planning time, we are working to update our Workplace Safety Plan and our Telework and Remote Work policies. We have begun engagement with our union partners via pre-decisional involvement (PDI).

## **Reminders**

EPA is continuing to maximize telework for all eligible EPA staff, including those in our office and laboratory spaces. Staff should continue to maximize telework for all work that can be performed remotely. The agency is adhering to safety protocols for those who must report in-person. Occupancy limits are still in effect except in areas with approved exceptions.

The agency will continue to follow guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the [Safer Federal Workforce Task Force](#), which is charged with keeping federal employees safe during the pandemic and navigating the changing conditions. If you have questions, please email them to [EPA\\_COVID-19\\_Coordination\\_Team@epa.gov](mailto:EPA_COVID-19_Coordination_Team@epa.gov).

I am committed to providing you frequent updates on the status of our Future of Work efforts. Thank you for the remarkable work you continue to accomplish throughout such a unique and challenging time. I appreciate your dedication to our mission.

Janet McCabe  
Deputy Administrator