

From: Message from the Administrator <messagefromtheadadministrator@epa.gov>

Sent: Monday, June 01, 2020 5:36 PM

To: Message from the Administrator <messagefromtheadadministrator@epa.gov>

Subject: Update Message from Administrator Wheeler



Colleagues,

I hope that everyone continues to stay safe and healthy – the well-being of you and your families remains my highest priority. This remains a difficult time for our agency and for our Nation and I am sure your stresses and concerns, like mine, have only been amplified with recent events and episodes of unrest around the country. One thing is certain, EPA remains committed to continuing our mission of protecting human health and the environment, doing our part to make a brighter tomorrow for future generations of all Americans, and all of you are critically important to that endeavor.

I want you to know that providing a safe and healthy workplace is my top commitment. We have developed our plans using [the Opening Up America Again Guidance](#), which provides a broad outline of the phases all federal agencies must go through before fully re-opening their facilities. This includes laying out “gating criteria” based on three sets of metrics: symptoms, tested cases, and hospital capacity. We’ve used this guidance to develop our own plan for EPA. Much important information related to EPA operations during the COVID-19 pandemic are available [on the EPA Intranet site](#) and I would encourage you to go to that site and read through the many resources that are available there. It is updated regularly with new information.

As you know, on May 21, 2020, I announced that Regions 4, 7, and 10 would close for seven days to ensure that any possible virus in those facilities would be rendered inactive prior to employees’ return. Any spaces that needed to be accessed during the closure were cleaned and disinfected before entering Phase 1. Last week, I was in Region 4 as they entered Phase 1. Regions 7 and 10 also entered Phase 1 last week.

Today, Regions 1, 6 and 8, along with several smaller facilities, will close for the 7-day period to assure any virus in those facilities

will be rendered inactive. We will be following [our own guidance on cleaning and disinfecting](#), which we developed with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) throughout this process.

Our Agency experts in the Office of Research and Development (ORD) have been assisting us in providing objective assessments on the status of each gating criteria in the commuting area surrounding our facility locations. These ORD scientific professionals follow CDC guidance on the gating criteria and pull information from the Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Census Bureau, Johns Hopkins University, and other expert sources to assess the criteria on symptoms, cases, and hospital capacity. We are also reviewing the guidance that state and local public health officials are providing in each location before making any decisions regarding moving into Phase 1 or moving in between phases.

I want to reemphasize that our plan for a phased return to our offices is both measured and deliberate to minimize risk to your health. Our plan provides for a “rolling reopening,” so each facility will enter Phase 1 after two thorough reviews of health information that meets the gating criteria while keeping in mind any City, State, or County requirements as well.

Once a facility enters any phasing period, we will stay in that phasing period for a minimum of two weeks. Once we are in a phase, we will continue to monitor local data and actions by state and local governments to determine if we should proceed into the next phase. We can move forward, stay in a specific phase for a longer period than two weeks, or we can move backward. The phases are designed to ensure that we move forward safely and responsibly.

In Phase 1, no employee is required or expected to return to the office, but they have the option of doing so if they choose. Also, in Phase 1, employees can still leverage the expanded work schedules and essential travel can begin again. Another important reminder is that maximum telework is available to all staff through Phase 2.

We will also provide ongoing flexibility to those with dependent care issues. Guidance on the intranet provides information on telework, work schedule flexibilities and travel and will be updated as we move through the phases.

I encourage you to keep checking the [EPA COVID-19 intranet page](#) for links to resources and other helpful information for employees. New resources on this site include:

- [Return to the Workplace Employee Information](#)
- [Employee Self-Assessment Questionnaire](#)
- [Contact Tracing and Employee Notification Guidance](#)
- [Facility Management Checklist](#)

As we work through all of this together, I continue to appreciate everyone's continued dedication and good work. You are EPA's most important asset, and I continue to believe you all represent the best and brightest in government.

Please continue to be good to yourselves – in due time we need you back at work healthy and strong.

Andrew Wheeler
Administrator