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Governor

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Commissioner

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**Memorandum**

To: Human Resources Leaders

From: Sid Johnson, Department of Administrative Services  
Commissioner

Dr. Brenda Fitzgerald, Department of Public Health  
Commissioner and State Health Officer

Workplace safety is a top priority for all of us. In light of the recent news and questions concerning the Ebola virus, we would like to take this opportunity to provide joint guidance in Q&A format to assist you in managing employee concerns.

**Q: Employees are beginning to express concerns about the safety of their work environment. What should I be doing?**

A: Calm their fears with facts. The possibility that a State employee might be exposed to the Ebola virus is extremely remote. For an employee to be exposed to the virus, they would have had to (1) have had physical contact with the bodily fluids of someone who has Ebola and is showing symptoms of Ebola disease (i.e., fever including low grade, severe headache, muscle pains, weakness, diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain, unexplained bleeding or bruising) or (2) have had a travel history in the past 21 days to an Ebola affected country.

Attached are some of the facts that you can share with your staff concerning the risk of exposure and symptoms.

**Q: How should I respond if an employee reports that she or he may have been exposed to Ebola?**

A: Ebola disease has an incubation period of 21 days from exposure, so the first thing to do is ask whether they have visited any of the countries affected by the Ebola virus (currently Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone) in the last 21 days, and whether they have had any contact with a person infected with the Ebola virus who is showing symptoms of Ebola disease. If the answers are "no" to both questions, then it is extremely unlikely that the employee has been exposed to the Ebola virus.

In the unlikely event that an employee might actually have been exposed to a confirmed case of Ebola, the employee should not come to the workplace until their 21 day window of incubation has expired without any signs of illness. A request to use sick leave in this situation should be approved. (State Personnel Board Rule 16(7)(b)(6)).

If you have an employee that has returned from an affected country who is not showing symptoms of disease, but remains within the 21-day window of incubation, consider a telework arrangement and encourage the employee to monitor their temperature daily and seek immediate medical attention if symptoms develop.

**Q: Can I insist that an employee use his or her accumulated leave?**

A: No. However, agency heads may prohibit employees from entering the workplace if they have reason to believe that the employee may pose a threat to the safety of the work environment. Agencies should confer with their legal counsel before prohibiting an employee from entering the workplace due to suspicion of exposure.

An employee's consent is needed in order to use an existing leave balance while they are absent from work. Unless the employee agrees to use his or her existing leave balance (e.g., sick, annual, personal), employees prohibited from entering the workplace due to confirmed Ebola exposure should be designated as "Authorized Leave Without Pay."

**Q: What if an employee has exhausted his or her sick leave balance?**

A: Your HR professional should follow normal procedures for addressing the employee's absence if sick leave is exhausted. The employee may use other accumulated leave or compensatory time, if available, for sick leave purposes. Otherwise the absence should be designated as "Authorized Leave Without Pay." Please note that neither state law nor State Personnel Board Rules authorize what some refer to as "administrative leave," or paid time off without use of accumulated leave.

If you have questions about the Ebola virus you may find further information at <http://dph.georgia.gov/ebola>, or you may call a 24-hour hotline at 1-866-PUB-HLTH (1-866-782-4584).

HR professionals may call or email the DOAS HRA Policy and Compliance team with questions about managing related workplace relations or pay.