

A man wearing a white short-sleeved button-down shirt, khaki pants, and a light-colored hat is walking through a field of green crops. The field is filled with rows of low-growing plants, likely soybeans, with small blue and red markers scattered throughout. In the background, there are more rows of crops, a dirt road, and a line of trees under a clear sky.

**NC STATE**

EXTENSION

# Protecting the Pack

How to Return to Work Safely:  
EXTENSION COUNTY CENTERS

# Contents

- › Overview
- › Gradual Return of Extension  
County Employees
- › Health and Safety in the Workplace
- › Mental and Emotional Well-Being



## Overview

NC State Extension is experiencing a gradual return of employees to work in our county centers, as dictated by operational needs of both Extension and county government, and in accordance with efforts to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19. This manual presents COVID-19 safety protocols to help create a safe and supportive work environment for our county employees as they transition back to the office. Campus-based Extension personnel can refer to NC State's campus return-to-work guide at [go.ncsu.edu/campus-return-to-work-guide](https://go.ncsu.edu/campus-return-to-work-guide). These protocols were developed based on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and the state of North Carolina.

As scientific knowledge of the coronavirus continues to evolve, the COVID-19 pandemic changes over time, and government and public-health officials issue new orders and guidance, NC State Extension will update relevant procedures and plans as needed. We will follow all university, local, state and federal orders, directives of the University of North Carolina System, and CDC guidelines to help ensure a safe environment in our county centers. Our top priority in all decisions is the health, safety and well-being of our Wolfpack community as well as our Extension clients.

All employees are expected to fully comply with the procedures, protocols and requirements outlined in this document and in any linked documents and websites, as well as any additional guidance they receive from their supervisors, local health officials and county government. This document is subject to updates. Please check the university's Coronavirus Information site ([www.ncsu.edu/coronavirus](https://www.ncsu.edu/coronavirus)) regularly for further details and updates.

Updated June 5, 2020.

# Gradual Return of Employees

Local governments are facilitating a gradual return of Extension employees to county centers. In addition to directives from your local government, Extension employees are expected to observe appropriate physical distancing, clean and disinfect workplace surfaces, and use the PPEs provided by Extension and the county. District and county Extension directors, in cooperation with county leadership, will decide which employees will return to work in-office, when and how to implement these plans for their local situations, and they will communicate those decisions to their employees.

CEDs should limit the number of employees in county office spaces to meet physical distancing requirements. As a result, some NC State Extension employees will continue working remotely at the discretion of the CED. Employees working remotely can access a University Human Resources remote-work toolkit at [go.ncsu.edu/remote-work-toolkit](https://go.ncsu.edu/remote-work-toolkit). Extension HR provides additional information and resources at [extensionhr.ces.ncsu.edu](https://extensionhr.ces.ncsu.edu).



## Ways for CEDs to Limit Virus Transmission

During the gradual return, CEDs should consider implementing the following measures to limit the spread of the coronavirus:

- › Schedule partial staffing on alternating days of the week.
- › Schedule consistent work teams on the same shifts, so that if a person on one shift becomes sick, workers on the other shifts are protected.
- › Stagger workplace arrival / departure times, break times and lunch breaks, as applicable, to minimize population density near building entrances and exits and in break areas, restrooms and other common spaces.



## If You Have Possible COVID-19 Symptoms, Stay Home

Employees who return to the workplace are expected to evaluate themselves for the presence of possible COVID-19 symptoms every day before reporting to work. To be eligible to report to work, an employee must not have any symptoms potentially related to COVID-19.

If you have any of the symptoms listed below, stay home, notify your supervisor and follow CDC guidelines ([www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html)) to determine whether you should seek medical care. NC State has instituted special leave provisions ([hr.ncsu.edu/pandemic-and-communicable-disease/covid-19-leave-provisions-4-1-20](http://hr.ncsu.edu/pandemic-and-communicable-disease/covid-19-leave-provisions-4-1-20)) for the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act ([hr.ncsu.edu/pandemic-and-communicable-disease/ffcra](http://hr.ncsu.edu/pandemic-and-communicable-disease/ffcra)) provides eligible employees with emergency paid sick leave and expanded family medical leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19.

### Do not report to work if you have any of the following symptoms:

- > Cough
- > Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- > Fever
- > Chills
- > Muscle pain
- > New loss of taste or smell
- > Sore throat (secondary symptom)



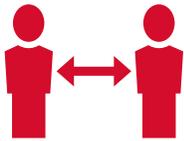
## Employee Self-Reporting of COVID-19

If you test positive for COVID-19, or if a health care provider tells you that you are presumed positive for the novel coronavirus, please notify both your CED and the university by filling out the form at [go.ncsu.edu/covid-self-report](http://go.ncsu.edu/covid-self-report). If you do not have web access, please call 919-513-0277 to self-report a positive diagnosis for COVID-19. This procedure is voluntary, and the information is confidential. The information on the form helps university health care professionals conduct contact tracing and provide any resources and support you might need. Employees who test positive for COVID-19 should communicate with their CED and/or Extension Human Resources about special COVID-19 leave provisions that are currently in effect.

# Health and Safety in the Workplace

Employees in county centers are expected, and in certain work situations may be required, to maintain physical distance from others and to wear face coverings. These measures are effective ways to limit transmission of the coronavirus because COVID-19 is an airborne disease that spreads from person to person through speaking, coughing or sneezing.

Physical distance and face coverings are not just to protect you; these measures protect those around you too. Many people who contract the coronavirus don't show symptoms at first, and some who contract the virus never develop symptoms — but asymptomatic people can still transmit the disease to others. That means it's possible for someone to have the coronavirus and give it to other people without even knowing it. Physical distance and face coverings reduce the likelihood of that happening.



## Physical Distancing

Employees in county centers are expected to maintain at least 6 feet of physical distance from others whenever possible, while adhering to applicable local ordinances.

- > Exterior doors of buildings may remain locked during the gradual return to limit population density and facilitate physical distancing. Talk to your CED about plans specific to your center.
- > In-person gatherings or meetings are limited to a maximum of 10 people indoors, or a maximum of 25 people outdoors, who are spaced at least 6 feet apart. If your county has implemented more restrictive guidelines, adhere to those. For meetings that cannot meet these requirements, use teleconferencing tools such as Zoom or Google Meet instead.
- > CEDs should ensure that visible reminders encouraging physical distancing — such as floor tape indicating 6 feet of distance, rearranged furniture and signs indicating traffic flow — are present in places such as building entrances and exits, mail rooms, break rooms and common areas. To access printable signs and templates for this purpose, visit NC State's Coronavirus Information site ([go.ncsu.edu/ncstate-coronavirus-signage-templates](https://go.ncsu.edu/ncstate-coronavirus-signage-templates)).
- > Employees are expected to follow signage directing traffic flow through building entrances, exits, elevators and other common areas.
- > It is highly recommended that only one employee ride in a work vehicle at any given time. Employees can use personal vehicles instead if they prefer. Face coverings are expected when traveling with others.



## Face Coverings

In situations where at least 6 feet of physical distance cannot be maintained or guaranteed — e.g., hallways, restrooms or multiperson workstations — county Extension employees are expected to wear face coverings that cover the mouth and nose. The university, and in some cases county governments, will provide face coverings to employees during the gradual return in accordance with CDC guidelines. If CEDs have questions about obtaining masks, contact your DED.

- > You are not expected to wear a face covering when you are not in close contact with someone else, such as when you are working alone in a room or office, or when you are walking alone in an uncrowded outdoor location.
- > Everyone is strongly encouraged to carry a face covering at all times, in case they encounter an unforeseen situation where at least 6 feet of physical distance cannot be maintained. Such situations are likely to occur in hallways, stairwells, elevators, restrooms and kitchens, for example.



## Personal Hygiene

You must cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the inside of your elbow — not with your hands. You should also avoid touching your face.

When you wash your hands, wash them for at least 20 seconds with soap and water. If soap and water are not readily available, you may use hand sanitizer instead. Should CEDs have questions about obtaining hand sanitizer, contact your local government officials to inquire about availability, or order as needed through MarketPlace or other suppliers. For more detailed information on effective hand hygiene, view the CDC's guidance for washing and sanitizing your hands ([www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html](http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html)).

### **You are expected to wash your hands at least in the following instances:**

- > At the beginning and end of each work shift
- > After using the restroom
- > Before and after eating
- > After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing



## Cleaning and Disinfection of Surfaces

High-touch surfaces and common spaces should be cleaned in accordance with CDC guidelines for disinfection ([www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html)). Employees and supervisors should take steps to reduce the number of common touch points in local center facilities.

The use of gloves is not required unless your CED has directed you to wear them. Remember that gloves do not give the wearer immunity, and any germs that might be on your gloves can be transferred to other surfaces. To avoid cross-contamination, safely remove gloves immediately after use.

### Employees are expected to use available supplies to clean and disinfect the following:

- > Their work area (as defined by the supervisor) at the start and end of each work day
- > Their work vehicle at the start and end of each shift (or before and after each use if the vehicle is shared)
- > Tools/equipment at the start and end of each shift (or after each use if the items are shared)

## Six Steps of Safety

To protect the safety of the Pack and our partners, remember to follow these six steps during the gradual return, and encourage others to follow them:



1. If you feel sick, stay home.



4. Wash your hands often (or use hand sanitizer).



2. Stay at least 6 feet away from others whenever possible.



5. Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the inside of your elbow.



3. Wear a face covering when you are close to others (6 feet away or less).



6. Disinfect surfaces often, especially shared items and touch points.



## Mental and Emotional Well-Being

We know the uncertainty of this pandemic may be causing great mental and emotional stress for our employees. Fear and anxiety can be overwhelming – not just for you, but for your family and loved ones as well. NC State offers employees resources and assistance to help you manage the mental and emotional aspects of your overall health. We encourage you to take advantage of these resources to help you address any issues that arise during the gradual return to work or at any time during your employment at NC State.

For more information on coping strategies specifically related to COVID-19, the CDC offers helpful resources at [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html).



## Faculty and Staff Assistance Program

The NC State Faculty and Staff Assistance Program provides resources to help employees address personal and work-life issues. All of FASAP's services are completely confidential and are provided to you and your dependents at no charge. For more information, visit the FASAP website ([er.hr.ncsu.edu/faculty-staff-assistance-program](http://er.hr.ncsu.edu/faculty-staff-assistance-program)) or call 866-467-0467.

FASAP's services include the following:

- > **Confidential counseling.** This counseling service helps you address stress, relationships and other personal issues you and your family may face. It is staffed by highly trained master's- and doctoral-level clinicians who will listen to your concerns and quickly refer you to one-on-one counseling or other resources as needed.
- > **Financial consulting.** Talk with certified public accountants and certified financial planners about a wide range of financial issues, including debt, credit, taxes and retirement.
- > **Legal support.** If you need help with legal issues, you can ask attorneys for advice. If you require legal representation, they will refer you to a qualified attorney in your area for a free 30-minute consultation, with a 25% reduction in customary legal fees thereafter.
- > **Work-life solutions.** To get help addressing such issues as child and elder care, home repairs or relocation, call the program's work-life specialists for information and qualified referrals.



## WellRec at Home

Wellness and Recreation's WellRec at Home initiative ([wellrec.dasa.ncsu.edu/wellrec-at-home](http://wellrec.dasa.ncsu.edu/wellrec-at-home)) provides online resources to help employees maintain and improve their physical and mental health during the coronavirus pandemic. The program teaches about 30 live virtual classes each week, posts prerecorded workouts and provides videos that offer guidance, support and instruction on meditation, mindfulness, stress reduction and other practices that support mental and emotional well-being. All of these resources are available to employees at no charge.



## COVID-19 Wellness Resources From University Human Resources

UHR has gathered a wide variety of free resources to support employees' mental, emotional, physical and financial health during the COVID-19 pandemic. You can access these resources at [benefits.hr.ncsu.edu/covid-19-wellness-resources](https://benefits.hr.ncsu.edu/covid-19-wellness-resources).



## Additional Questions and Information

Visit NC State's Coronavirus Information site ([www.ncsu.edu/coronavirus](http://www.ncsu.edu/coronavirus)) for regular university updates and additional resources. For more Extension-specific tools and information, visit NC State Extension's COVID-19 Resources Portal ([covid19.ces.ncsu.edu](https://covid19.ces.ncsu.edu)).

**View this manual online at [go.ncsu.edu/extension-return-to-work-guide](https://go.ncsu.edu/extension-return-to-work-guide).**

Please reference the following resources for additional information:

- > CDC Decision Tree for Reopening Workplaces ([go.ncsu.edu/cdc-reopening-decision-tree](https://go.ncsu.edu/cdc-reopening-decision-tree))
- > CDC Reopening Guidance | Cleaning and Disinfecting ([go.ncsu.edu/cdc-guidance-cleaning-disinfecting](https://go.ncsu.edu/cdc-guidance-cleaning-disinfecting))
- > NC State University COVID-19 Signage and Templates ([go.ncsu.edu/ncstate-coronavirus-signage-templates](https://go.ncsu.edu/ncstate-coronavirus-signage-templates))
- > N.C. Health and Human Services COVID-19 Site (<http://covid19.ncdhhs.gov>)
- > NC State University Campus Return-to-Work Guide ([go.ncsu.edu/campus-return-to-work-guide](https://go.ncsu.edu/campus-return-to-work-guide))
- > Social Media COVID-19 Reopening Checklist ([go.ncsu.edu/social-media-checklist-covid19-reopening](https://go.ncsu.edu/social-media-checklist-covid19-reopening))
- > Count On Me NC Initiative (<http://countonmenc.org>)

# **NC STATE EXTENSION**