Happy Summer CMS! As we move through the month of July, we are also moving through Phase Four of the Restore Illinois plan and getting closer to our new normal. Since March, we’ve made tough adjustments to our home and work lives to help stop the spread of COVID-19 and that sacrifice has significantly impacted our progress and helped to keep our most vulnerable family members, friends and neighbors protected.

As of now, Illinois has the lowest infection rates among all our neighboring states and one of the lowest positivity rates in the country. This is tremendous news considering the positivity rate was at least five times higher in May, when the number of new cases peaked in the State.

This has been no easy feat, and we know that Illinois is not immune to the trends that are sweeping the nation. We must continue to be diligent in practicing social distancing, washing our hands and most critically, wearing face coverings to help the State stay on track, especially as we begin to venture outside again. Remember, your mask protects me and my mask protects you.

In Phase Four, we are resuming many more activities and can now enjoy some of the best parts of summer with our families and loved ones. All State parks are open as well as outdoor patios at restaurants and bars, museums and zoos.

Phase Four is all about revitalization which is considerably timely given the state of our nation now. Illinois is working to revitalize businesses and communities who have been affected by COVID-19 and many businesses and allies are standing up to revitalize Black communities who have been afflicted by the burden of racism for decades. We recognize that many have been heavily affected by both.

CMS is committed to this work and on June 19, 2020, we kicked off the first of many CMS Conversations to come to discuss anti-racism and the historical context of Juneteenth. The webinar was co-hosted with Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton and focused on the important work the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) is doing to support Black and minority-owned businesses in the State.

CMS is committed to standing with our vendor community and employees to promote equity and inclusion no matter where you live or the color of your skin. I am committed to continuing these conversations to help us all learn and grow in respect for one another and the residents of Illinois that we serve each day.

So, as we prepare to move forward towards our new normal, let’s work to make Illinois better, safer and more equitable than before for each of us.

Stay safe and be well CMS,

Janel
In recognition of months of work coordinating COVID-19 stay-at-home policies even while developing return-to-work plans and guidelines for State workers, the ad hoc CMS Return-to-Work leadership and implementation committee is being recognized as the CMS Employee Team of the Month for July 2020.

“I cannot say enough about the wonderful work of this leadership team and the entire CMS staff in stepping up to the occasion of this crisis,” said CMS Director Janel L. Forde. “I realize these are a lot of the key leaders I depend on every day in managing CMS, but this group deserves the recognition in this very unusual time. This leadership team has worked non-stop since the beginning of the COVID crisis to prepare and plan for a return-to-work protocol that can now be utilized by all executive agencies in a logical and consistent manner.”

The entire implementation team involved in planning and developing these return-to-work rules and guidelines numbers in the dozens of staff members in CMS, but the planning team originated in the Office of the Director and lists names familiar to all CMS staff, including key figures such as Chief Operations Officer Ayse Kalaycioglu, Senior Policy Advisor Sarah Kerley, Chief Administrative Officer Mark Mahoney, and Assistant Deputy Director for Labor Relations Colleen Alderman. The list extends further to names like the Bureau of Agency Services and Deputy Director Peter Newman; the Bureau of Property Management and CMS Statewide Facilities Manager James Fox; the Illinois Office of Communications and Information (IOCI) and IOCI Deputy Director Marjani Williams; the Bureau of Strategic Sourcing and Deputy Director Ron Wilson; and the Office of Rapid Results and Deputy Director for Operational Excellence John Baranzelli.

The overall team coordinator, Chief of Staff Anthony Pascente, directed all praise to staff members in every CMS Bureau. “We really need to recognize our excellent folks in every Bureau involved in making these plans, including those stepping up to implement the work, and there are a lot of names on that list,” Pascente said. “They have worked very quickly to ensure a safe return to work for all staff members as we bring them back in the weeks ahead. The work they have done in developing, communicating, and distributing useful guidelines and needed return-to-work training and information has just been incredible. We already have heard great feedback from a number of other agencies as we have rolled out some guidelines in conference calls. As a result, I think we will see a great deal of consistency and order throughout State government as all agencies return to work.”

The committee’s work included researching and compiling return-to-work policies from leading health experts and government agencies, even as members developed helpful reference sheets and guidelines to follow in planning the return from COVID stay-at-home orders.

“So much of this was simply unexplored territory for all of us,” said Chief of Operations Kalaycioglu. “Even as we were sending most of our staff members to isolate and work from home in mid-March, elements of this team were already working on the structure that would be necessary to bring them back at an unknown time. It has been an incredible experience for all of us – one we’re all still learning from. But elements of this team have been involved in all aspects of research, draft, development of guides, and rehearsals for actual returns.”

“It all has come together well because we started quickly and didn’t have to rush it; we had time to get it done right,” said Chief Administrative Officer Mahoney. “The leadership team really laid the groundwork for everything else and communications and support from all directions were very good.”

Mahoney believes many of the lessons learned during the stay-at-home order could help State government operate more efficiently and effectively in the future. “We were creative and developed many solutions to the challenges of telework and could adopt these same practices in the future,” Mahoney said. “We’ve become more efficient on handling things like teleconferencing instead of in-person meetings, we’re seeing less need to print things out, we’re using e-signatures to move processes forward more quickly, and in many ways, we’ve found that teleworking can be a very productive thing in many ways so we’ll look at improving those policies.”

In the end, the committee has succeeded in making return-to-work known process to be safely followed instead of an unknown threat to be feared. “I think the best example comes from the teleconferences we’ve had with other agencies recently, outlining the guidelines and information the team has put together, and basic return-to-work policies,” Pascente said. “In our last update meeting, for every question we received from the group, we were able to point out that those answers all were contained in the guidelines we provided. This group has done really good work on this.”
Return to Work

As State functions resume, more employees will also gradually return to work based on the unique needs of each operation. At this time, many CMS employees will continue to social distance through telework but you may receive notice that you are requested to return to work.

Before returning to work, your supervisor will share your work site’s specific plan and discuss standing operating procedures with detailed guidance for social distancing in shared spaces, workspace cleanliness and personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements.

All State employees are required to follow strict social distancing guidelines and wear a face covering in the workplace. Upon returning to work, you will be provided with the necessary PPE. Worksite designs have been updated to help enforce occupancy limits and crews have installed new signage in elevators, restrooms and communal spaces to help maintain mindfulness about proper COVID-19 safety precautions.

Safety Corner

Fireworks Safety Tips

The Office of the State Fire Marshal and the National Fire Protection Association generally recommend that people attend a professional fireworks display on July 4th to ensure a safe holiday, however due to COVID-19 that may not be possible this year.

People interested in shooting fireworks, either privately or as a professional display, should be aware of Illinois’ fireworks regulations. The regulations divide fireworks displays into two categories:

- consumer fireworks, which include such items as fountains, repeaters and parachutes
- pyrotechnic displays, which use professional grade fireworks such as mortars, cake bundles, and ground displays that depict a picture.

Both types of displays are only permitted in villages, municipalities and counties that have passed ordinances allowing such displays.

It’s important to note that several well-known types of fireworks, such as firecrackers, bottle rockets and Roman candles, are not allowed in Illinois.

Novelty fireworks, such as snakes, sparklers, and party-poppers, are not regulated by the state, although municipalities have the authority to enact an ordinance prohibiting the sale and use of sparklers on public property. While legal, sparklers present a serious danger because of the high temperature of the wire during and after its use. Sparklers burn at temperatures of up to 1,200 degrees Fahrenheit (982 degrees Celsius) and remain extremely hot long after the sparks have stopped. Many children are injured each year by sparklers. Children playing with novelty fireworks must be closely supervised by adults to prevent injury.

Fireworks started an estimated 19,500 fires in 2018, including 1,900 structure fires, 500 vehicle fires, and 17,100 outside and other fires. These fires caused five deaths, 46 civilian injuries, and $105 million in direct property damage.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), U.S. hospital emergency rooms treated an estimated 9,100 non-occupational fireworks related injuries; burns accounted for 44 percent of the fireworks injuries seen in the month around July 4.

Please click here to view a video from the National Fire Protection Association.

CMS Conversations

CMS University now has a new section called CMS Conversations with anti-racism resources to help you understand the history and continued impact of racial discrimination in the U.S. Visit the site for recommendations for books, articles, TV shows and much more information on how to discuss these issues with colleagues, friends and family.

Click here to access CMS Conversations.
CMS Celebrates Juneteenth

CMS held its inaugural celebration of Juneteenth on Friday, June 19, 2020 to announce new progress in the Department’s efforts to promote economic development amongst Black and other minority-owned businesses. The webinar was co-hosted by Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton and included a panel discussion with Avis Lavelle, Executive Director of the Business Leadership Council, Jonathan McGee, Deputy Director, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and Herb Stokes of the Minority Chicago Minority Supplier Development Council, Inc. around the need for entrepreneurship and creating wealth in the Black community.

The webinar was attended by more 140 vendors, State employees and partners and kicked off a new series of CMS Conversations, designed to provide resources related to anti-racism in an effort to promote diversity, inclusion and cultural competency throughout CMS.

Through BEP, CMS is committed to supporting the economic development of Black communities and Black businesses, especially as they confront the pandemics of both COVID-19 and racism. BEP has endeavored to remedy disparities like these since 1984, and beginning July 1, the program will recognize the certification of businesses owned by minorities, women, or persons with disabilities, who are certified by the City of Chicago or Cook County, with a single affidavit, leading to full certification in seven business days through the new FastTrack certification process.

Please click here to view the Juneteenth webinar recording.

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