

IRS Begins Phased Recall Focused on Three States

The IRS has announced it will begin the first phase of returning employees to work by calling back employees in three states – Kentucky, Texas and Utah. Employees will begin receiving calls this week and instructions to return June 1. The IRS announcement raises many questions and concerns for employees. According to the agency, it is starting with these three states based on its assessment of each state's current reopening status and the need to complete filing season work while ensuring employee safety.

The IRS is calling this the first phase, but there are no immediate plans to bring employees back in other areas of the country. These three states include campus operations along with other IRS PODs.

Who is being recalled?

- Employees without portable work in the three states: Utah, Texas and Kentucky
- Employees currently on weather and safety leave
- Among the three states, the potential number of employees to be called is 11,000
- Employees will be recalled in inverse seniority

If I am called, do I have to return?

Generally, yes. The IRS has the right to call employees back to work and you must report to work when directed by your supervisor.

What if I have an underlying medical condition?

Employees who are considered high risk are to self-certify this fact to their supervisor and will remain on weather and safety leave, or continue teleworking if already doing so.

I have small children at home and no child care. Do I have to return?

According to the IRS, you should return to work because weather and safety leave cannot be used for child care. You may decide to take personal leave if you can't report for duty.

NTEU believes you should have the option to receive administrative leave, and we have discussed this with the IRS. This situation is likely to play out across government and the IRS reports that it has approached the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) seeking guidance on options it can offer to employees. OPM has yet to respond. We will keep at it until an acceptable option becomes available.

What if I live in one of these states and do not get a call?

The IRS has indicated that supervisors will contact those employees required to report. Do not report to work if you are not directed to. If you are concerned, contact your supervisor for further information.

I am currently teleworking. Do I have to return to the worksite?

No. Those on telework will remain on telework. The IRS is still operating under an evacuation order which allows it to direct employees with portable work to telework and remains committed to maximum telework.

Health and Safety Measures

NTEU is well aware that this initial phase of calling back employees heightens your anxiety about keeping yourself and your families safe during this pandemic. We have spent a great deal of time discussing with IRS officials the steps the agency is taking to make workplaces as safe as possible.

Those measures include: requesting that employees who do not feel well stay at home; examining worksites for social distancing; providing masks to employees without one (you are encouraged to bring your own); and stocking up worksites with hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes (the wipes are scarce but the IRS is shipping what it has to PODs in Utah, Texas and Kentucky).

Frequent and adequate cleaning remains a big concern for IRS employees. The agency reports that cleaning crews are doing enhanced cleaning of worksites including daily disinfecting of high touch-point areas like elevator buttons, door handles, handrails and bathrooms. Be aware that this cleaning does not include electronic equipment you use such as your mouse and keyboard. You are encouraged to clean those yourself and the IRS is attempting to procure supplies for you to use. NTEU asked that agency managers be sure to provide time for employees to clean this equipment.

More Information to Come

There are outstanding questions NTEU is asking and more that the IRS needs to tell us. We will share information as we receive it. NTEU is aggressively insisting that your health comes first and the IRS shares that goal. This is unsettling news for many, but IRS chapter leaders will be in your workplaces to help identify and solve problems as they arise and we will continue working at the national level.

Thank you for your support of NTEU and your service to America's taxpayers.