

NTEU Demands Protections Before Reopening Federal Buildings

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Washington D.C. – The National Treasury Employees Union today released the health and safety conditions that must be met before federal employees are required to return to the workplace.

The conditions include: lifting of state and local stay-at-home orders; proof of a thorough cleaning; widespread access to COVID-19 tests for federal employees; adequate supplies of sanitizers and disinfectants; a policy of voluntary maximum telework; workspaces that accommodate safe physical distancing; a process for taking employee temperatures before they enter the building; permitting and providing the use of cloth face coverings; and continued telework or weather and safety leave for those who are at high-risk.

"Most federal employees have never missed a beat during this pandemic, either successfully teleworking from home or continuing to report to duty because their job is not eligible for telework," Reardon said. "But before those away from the office are required to return, NTEU will insist that some basic steps be taken to reduce the risks to their health and well-being."

NTEU is providing this flier to employees we represent – and their agencies -- as a benchmark. With the recall of IRS employees, it is clear that all federal agencies need to take stock now of where they are and what should be done before employees return.

"We were critical of those agencies that were too slow to expand telework or close their buildings as the coronavirus spread throughout the country," Reardon said. "And now we are on guard for those who want to reopen them too quickly before the public health threat has subsided."

Much of what NTEU is calling for is supported in the guidelines released by the Office of Management and Budget.

"NTEU will work with the agencies where we represent employees to ensure that they carefully adhere to OMB's precautions," Reardon said. "Going forward, I hope federal agencies take note of the success of the maximum telework programs during this crisis and reverse their previous, misguided attempts to roll back telework in the federal workplace. NTEU applauds the dedication of these federal employees in serving their country during this difficult period."

Federal employees, just like everyone else, are eager to return to a normal work routine but not if it endangers their families, their coworkers or their communities.

"As long as local, state and federal public health experts agree that sheltering at home is helping to minimize the spread of coronavirus and save lives, we believe the federal government should maintain its policy of maximum telework and administrative leave to keep its workforce safe," Reardon said.

NTEU represents 150,000 employees at 33 federal agencies and departments.

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