

Office of Missouri Governor
MICHAEL L. PARSON

Dear members of the State of Missouri team –

I want to start on a personal note: I am sure that you and your family, like mine, have been following the COVID-19 situation closely. I imagine you are concerned for your families. You must be. We all are trying to figure out what to do and the answers are not always clear. Just this past weekend, my wife and I decided to move her mother, who is nearly 80, from Ohio to live with us here in Missouri. We had to balance the risks of her being alone in Ohio versus those of being in a household with two very active kids. You all will have to make similar tough decisions. This kind of uncertainty is stressful.

In the weeks ahead, personally, I urge you to take care of yourselves and your families. Our families are the bedrocks of our communities. Help your neighbors. And I also urge you all to care for your teammates at work. Be understanding as they manage things. We all will need support – from the most seasoned veteran to the newest employee.

Now, to our work together...

There are many uncertainties about COVID-19's path in the months ahead. The experts do not yet know enough about COVID-19 to answer every question we might have. We don't know, for instance, how long the challenge will last. In state government, we have been working to prepare for COVID-19. We will continue to adapt every day. You all are part of that change. And that kind of change is unsettling.

Despite COVID-19's uncertainties, there are some things we want everyone to know:

Governor Parson and his entire Cabinet team recognize the COVID-19 pandemic for what it is – an unprecedented emergency that will touch every family in Missouri in some way. Mobilizing our state government to help Missouri respond to COVID-19 is the Governor's top priority.

We will make it through this challenge by **caring for each other and our mission**. As public servants, we have a special role to play in our communities. Our communities are counting on us.

That's why the leadership teams across our 16 departments have been working for weeks to prepare for COVID-19. We have had the benefit of a bit of time – unlike some states on the coasts of the United States. Also, last year, every department reviewed and updated their Continuity of Operations Plans. Department leaders have been working together every day to adapt and implement these plans for this situation. Many colleagues in Department of Health and Senior Services, the Department of Public Safety, the Office of Administration, and elsewhere have been working tirelessly since January to manage this challenge. Much of this work started behind the scenes in every department.

We have directed every department to implement their updated **Continuity of Operations Plans**, including following the latest public health guidance. A big part of this means the basics: washing your hands, keeping surfaces clean, and practicing social distancing. You can find more guidance here: <https://health.mo.gov/living/healthcondiseases/communicable/novel-coronavirus/>

Every department is taking action. Different departments work differently to serve our citizens. So while we have statewide overall policies and guidance, there will be some variations across and within departments in how they adapt their day-to-day operations. We also have to be realistic. There have been and will be bumps along this road. Not every new process or piece of technology works without glitches. Teams are working together in new ways. No one expects everything to move smoothly, especially at the start. We have to be patient with each other and with ourselves when we stumble. We have to do, learn, and then do. We will keep getting better.

One thing is certain: We must and will continue to push to find **creative solutions for social distancing** while we deliver the essential functions of state government. These steps range from altering shift schedules to job sharing to telework. This also means turning meetings into calls – or cancelling meetings entirely. We have already cancelled larger group trainings and conferences. Managers and supervisors are working in new ways with their teams, sometimes at a distance. Some departments will to apply for waivers to operate in new ways too. In sum, the entire Cabinet leadership team will continue to push hard to reduce the density of people working together. This is all in line with expert public health guidance.

I urge you to look for **communications** from your leaders. In addition to your department leaders, read the updates from the Office of Administration. These are important. Consider the updated leave policy for the COVID-19 situation that OA proactively developed: this new policy minimizes those situations where a team member has to choose between coming to work and caring for a family member. That's a big deal in these uncertain times. Also watch for the Department of Health and Senior Services weekly health updates. A new one just came out. These are filled with practical, expert advice.

You can find a one-stop-shop for these updates at: <https://oa.mo.gov/personnel/state-team-member-resources>

On Tuesday, the Governor spoke with leading infectious disease experts from across the state. They highlighted the seriousness of the COVID-19 challenge. No one should doubt that. They also emphasized that right now the most powerful weapon to slow the spread of COVID-19 and reduce its overall impact is in all of our hands: every citizen needs to follow the guidance of public health experts. Again, this means the basics: staying home if you are sick and contacting your doctor, washing your hands, keeping surfaces clean, and practicing real social distancing.

None of this will be easy. It will be rocky at times. Help each other. When we rally together and do our part, we will protect our families, our communities, and the citizens of Missouri. I am confident we will together make a difference for all Missourians.

Thank you for your service every day. My family thanks you too. Be safe.

Drew Erdmann

Chief Operating Officer

State of Missouri