



March 6th, 2020

NRAO/GBO COVID-19 Response

Over the past few months the global spread of the coronavirus COVID-19 has accelerated, and the US Center for Disease Control (CDC) is predicting widespread infection in the United States and other countries over the next few weeks/months. Information on the virus can be found at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

In response to this health threat, NRAO/GBO will be adopting travel restrictions, revised workplace practices, and developing new supportive policies in an attempt to minimize exposure to, and spread of, the virus in the workplace. A guiding principle of these restrictions is: that the decisions and practices of the NRAO/GBO/ALMA-AUI workplace should not significantly increase the overall health risks of infection for our staff. This does not, however, replace or override the personal responsibilities we all have as individuals to make correct decisions and demonstrate appropriate behaviors as members of a community. The travel restrictions, workplace changes, and policy modifications described below will apply to all facilities in AUI's Radio Astronomy Operations portfolio, i.e. NRAO, GBO, and the AUI employees associated with ALMA (both International Staff Members ISMs and Local Staff Members LSMs).

New Travel Restrictions:

- Effective March 15th, NRAO/GBO/ALMA-ISM staff will halt all work-based international travel until the end of May. Trips ending before March 15th should continue; trips beginning before March 15th and ending before March 22nd should proceed. Effective immediately, no new authorizations for international travel beginning after March 15th should be approved, and any costs associated with canceling or deferring activities will be covered by NRAO/GBO. By "NRAO/GBO/ALMA-ISM Travel" we mean observatory-funded travel or any other official business. International moves associated with staff recruitments will continue, with some form of work-from-home/hotel quarantine (7-14 days) for international arrivals to be implemented (quarantine details to be developed next week). Recruitment in general should proceed through this period, with Environment-Safety-Security(ESS)/Human Resources(HR) to review situations on a case-by-case basis. Costs associated with quarantine periods will be covered by NRAO/GBO.
- We will halt all international travel to our sites, including visitors, colloquia speakers, and business travelers; all should be deferred or canceled, without exception, through the end of May.
- Effective immediately, we will restrict NRAO/GBO staff domestic travel and US visitors to NRAO sites and GBO to "essential only" instances. The Department Heads (Assistant Directors) will review and present essential travel cases to the Director's Office and ESS for approval. "Essential" here means – essential to the government/people of the United States, not essential to NRAO/GBO or the Department.

Local or regional travel (defined as: travel to destinations within 2-3 hours' drive) – may be assessed and approved by Department Heads.

- Beginning March 15th, we will restrict international and public visits (public/VIP/non-operational) to the OSF/AOS to those deemed ALMA Observatory critical, as determined by the ALMA Director. Domestic travel within Chile to support ALMA operations will continue normally, until a time at which the ALMA Director, with input from AUI, decides otherwise.
- Effective immediately, we shall postpone/defer/cancel/shift-to-video any large group international meetings at all NRAO/GBO/ALMA locations through the end of May. This would include schools, open houses, conferences, reviews, etc. If there are large domestic-only events these should generally be considered non-essential and deferred, but case-by-case review will be considered. People uncertain about the plans for any NRAO/GBO event should contact their Department Head. At this time we are proceeding with planning for our student summer programs, but will monitor the situation closely. Large site-based internal-only gatherings may continue, but are generally discouraged and alternatives should be explored.
- Our Visitor centers will remain open, with modified practices. Please contact ESS, EPO, and/or GBO for details.

Workplace Changes:

- **The most fundamental change in workplace practice to be adopted immediately: if an employee feels sick, with symptoms similar to those indicated for COVID-19 (fever, cough, shortness of breath, flu-like symptoms) – they should stay at home.** Please contact your supervisor/Department Head/HR and inform them you are monitoring yourself at home. In such cases, we will be providing additional information to support further decision making on next steps.
- ESS, Facilities & Admin, HR, and the Admin Pool have been asked to devise and implement any procedural/physical/infrastructure changes required to diminish internal transmission of the virus, e.g. adopting general approaches used by hospitals: distribution of alcohol-based hand sanitizers and wipes, minimizing hand contact, etc. A list of recommended changes will be developed by March 13th for review and implementation the following week.

Policy Changes:

- HR and Budget will examine our policy suite, and develop a proposal for changes to our operating principles for the next few months to support (a) people feeling unwell who are staying home without a formal diagnosis, (b) legitimate quarantine practices for us to implement in essential or recruiting situations, (c) work from home/EOS considerations for the period after May, if this situation continues to worsen, (d) how all financial losses associated with this change will be recorded and addressed, (e) what approvals from NSF for modified “allowability” may be needed in the future.
- Employees with compromised immune systems (or with family members with related issues) may request special considerations or remote work arrangements, if applicable.

Review:


- We will review the situation and the above changes every two weeks during this restriction period, and discussion of extension or cancellation of the restrictions in the first week of May. If the infection rate in the US continues to increase over the next three months, we may extend these restrictions (perhaps modified, based on experiences through the end of May) throughout the summer.

I have received several questions along the lines of:

- *“I have a personal trip coming up, or a member of my immediate family has/will travel, what should I do? Should I self-quarantine away from work for 14 days when I/they return?”*
- *“A member of my immediate family is displaying COVID-19 symptoms, and is about to be tested – should I quarantine myself?”*
- *“A member of my family has been confirmed as infected with COVID-19; should I come to work?”*

These situations are difficult to address for a virus such as COVID-19, with a 10-14 day incubation period and mild or no symptoms in many cases. It is quite possible the employee could have transmitted the virus in the workplace long before symptoms are detected. Decisions about personal activities, and risks of spreading the virus in the community are the responsibility of the individual employee, not the organization. AUI/NRAO/GBO will provide information and decision support, but cannot impose employee actions in these cases. If an employee is demonstrating symptoms, the situation is clear: they should stay at home. If you have a family member who is sick and you want to support them or self-quarantine - there are options like using vacation, or family medical leave. We will restructure our sick leave/emergency policies to support positive decisions by employees.

As we implement these changes in coming weeks, it is likely that numerous complex situations will be encountered, requiring case-by-case evaluation. Any staff member with questions, concerns or comments, please contact your supervisor, Department Head, Site Director, or me. A website to coordinate information has been set up and will be populated next week: <https://info.nrao.edu/covid-19>



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