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Office of Human Resources

Dear Colleague,

As supervisors, administrators, and HR staff members, we have an obligation to respect the privacy of University employees related to their health conditions. During this time of vigilance around COVID-19, we obviously want to be as prompt and transparent as possible in providing information. However, we must also continue to handle employee health and personnel data in a manner that complies with state and federal laws and University policies. This includes information that an employee has sought a COVID-19 or any other medical test or is absent from work for a medical condition.

As always, information may be shared with appropriate supervisors and administrators on a need-to-know basis. However, unless you have received authorization from the employee, information about an employee's health should not be shared beyond the need-to-know group. This generally means it may not be shared with co-workers. If you receive questions or are preparing communications for your unit, any communications should be reviewed by University Relations before sending. We encourage you to direct employees to the information from President Gabel and the other official communications from University leaders. You should also make sure employees know that the University is following the procedures developed by the Minnesota Department of Health when any member of the University community tests positive for COVID-19. This includes providing prompt notification to people who might have had contact with the community member.

We understand the challenge in balancing the privacy of employee health information with the public interest during this challenging situation. However, we are still obligated to follow workplace and privacy rules. If information or guidance is given by federal and state agencies on how COVID-19 may change our obligations under those laws, we will make that information available to you. If you have questions about the sharing of information, please contact ohr@umn.edu for guidance before making the communication.

Sincerely,

Kenneth E. Horstman
Interim Vice President

This email was sent to University supervisors and HR Leads, with a copy to Employee Relations consultants and OHR senior leaders, on behalf of Kenneth E. Horstman on January 18, 2020, by Office of Human Resources, 100 Donhowe Building, 319 15th Ave SE, Minneapolis, MN, 55455, USA. The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer. [Read our privacy statement.](#)

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