COVID-19 Temporary Furlough Colleague FAQs

Updated April 21, 2020

General

What is a furlough?
A furlough is a temporary, unpaid administrative leave of absence from work. Affected colleagues will not be compensated during the furlough, but will continue to receive benefits such as health, dental and basic life insurance and will be able to elect to use PTO during the furlough. See the Summary of Benefits on Unpaid Leave for additional benefits information provided to you by Human Resources.

Why are furloughs happening?
COVID-19 is a historical global health crisis that is disrupting our ministry and our lives. It is straining the resources of health systems across the country including ours. These changes and challenges require us to make difficult decisions. We must simultaneously continue to control our spending and reallocate resources to support our ministries and the people on the front line during this pandemic. These changes and challenges have led us to make a number of incredibly difficult decisions that will take effect beginning April 6:

- While the majority of our colleagues will continue to work full-time in their current roles, we are redeploying colleagues to different roles and locations and reducing hours for some roles.
- We are also temporarily furloughing a number of workforce colleagues, primarily those in non-clinical areas by putting them on a temporary furlough.
- Our executive leaders are experiencing a compensation reduction.
- We have frozen our capital investments, except for capital supporting our hospitals in responding to this crisis.

We plan to bring back as many of our colleagues as we can at the appropriate time. We are grateful for their continued commitment. This is a very serious action to take, and it’s not one that we came to easily. We greatly respect and value every single colleague. This will be a difficult journey, but we will do absolutely everything we can to support our impacted colleagues during this time while balancing our commitments to our patients, residents and communities.

Who is impacted by this decision?
These decisions apply to all MercyOne ministries.
**Does this impact patient care?**

Patients are – and will remain – our top priority. We are preparing to care for high volumes of patients who might be affected as COVID-19 spreads. We are solely focused on caring for all those who need critical care services at this time.

**Process**

**What do I need to do before the furlough period begins?**

- Please follow all instructions provided by Human Resources.
  - Trinity Health colleagues, see additional information here: [www.trinity-health.org/colleague-resources](http://www.trinity-health.org/colleague-resources)
  - CommonSpirit colleagues, see additional information here: [www.catholichealth.net](http://www.catholichealth.net)
- Add your personal mobile phone number and address in your Workday profile, so Human Resources can contact you with important information and to coordinate return-to-work next steps.
  - See instructions here.
- Update your out-of-office message in voicemail (if possible) and Outlook email to: “I am currently out of the office on an extended leave and am unable to respond to messages during this time. Please contact ___ at ___ with questions. Thank you.”

**I’m working from home. Do I need to return my laptop, badge or other equipment to my work location?**

No, please keep your MercyOne-issued devices, badge and any other items with you. Please store them safely and securely until you return to work.

**While I’m on furlough, can I still check my work email?**

It is important MercyOne adheres to federal, state and local labor laws related to furlough. As noted in the Furlough Acknowledgement, you cannot perform any work during their furlough period; therefore, you should not access work applications.

However, in order to avoid disruption, only MercyOne remote network access will be disabled during your furlough period. This means that during your furlough period, you will not have access to applications that require MercyOne network connection.

Remote network access will be disabled after you complete the furlough acknowledgement in Workday. This will be re-enabled when you return to work. Examples of applications you will not be able to access during the furlough period because they require MercyOne network connection:

- Network VPN/remote access
- PeopleSoft/Kronos
You will retain access to the following applications, but you should not access them until you return to work:

- Outlook, Yammer, OneNote, Teams, Excel, Word and other applications through Microsoft Office
- HealthStream
- MyKnowledgeHub

You are welcome to access the following websites for personal purposes during the furlough period:

- Workday
- Human Resource Portals
- Employee Assistance Programs
  - Trinity Health: Carebridge
  - CommonSpirit: Vital Work Life
- Employee Wellness Programs (Live Your Whole Life or CHI Wellness)
- Discount Programs (PerkSpot Discount Portal)
- Health Savings Account Programs (HealthEquity)
- Colleague Resources related to COVID-19

Who do I contact with questions during the furlough period?

MercyOne colleagues, please reach out to your local Human Resources Business Partner.

Who will contact me about my return to work?

Human Resources will contact you to coordinate your return to work.

Unemployment Compensation and Paid Time Off (PTO)

When I am on furlough, do I have to use PTO, or can I save it and go unpaid instead?

Yes, you have the option to go unpaid rather than use your PTO or the PTO Emergency Reserve program. This election will be made electronically in Workday for Trinity Health colleagues or for CommonSpirit colleagues. This election may be made electronically through Kronos or communicate their PTO request through their leader.

Am I eligible for unemployment benefits during the furlough period?

Yes; colleagues are encouraged to call Iowa Workforce Development at 1-866-239-0843 for more details. Information is available at [www.iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov](http://www.iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov).
Do I have to use all my PTO before applying for and receiving unemployment benefits?

No, you do not need to exhaust your PTO before applying for unemployment benefits; it is totally up to you if you want to use some or all of your PTO. Colleagues can file their unemployment benefits claim at any time. However, if you choose to use some PTO or float holidays, the income received for that benefit must be reported for that week of the unemployment claim, including the type of pay, total amount payable, the weekly amount and the time period that the pay covers.

Do I have to report PTO hours when filing for unemployment benefits?

Colleagues must report any earning while filing for unemployment benefits while on extended leave (furlough) – including PTO payments for each week they are receiving PTO. For example, if you have two (2) weeks of PTO you are going to use beginning April 13. When you certify for benefits, you would report one week of PTO for the week of April 12-18 and the second week for the week of April 19-25. The PTO pay will act as a reduction or offset on your weekly benefit rate.

After a claim is filed, you will be asked to “certify” your eligibility for benefits once every two (2) weeks via phone or internet. During the certification process, you will be asked about the past two (2) completed calendar weeks (Sunday through Saturday).

What happens to my PTO if I am not called back to work after 90 days? Do I lose it all or is it paid out in a lump sum?

If you are not called back to work after 90 days, your PTO would not be paid out nor would you lose it. If you are not called back after 90 days, furlough period will need to be extended. If your employment is involuntarily separated, then you will be paid out any accrued/unused PTO. You will not lose any accrued/unused PTO hours.

My hours were reduced, but I am not on furlough. Am I eligible for unemployment compensation?

In situations where hours are reduced, colleagues may be entitled to collect partial or whole unemployment benefits. Check your eligibility through www.iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov. These types of claims are known as “underemployment” claims. Colleagues must report all gross wages earned in a specific calendar week to the unemployment agency. The colleague’s weekly benefit entitlement will be based on the wages earned and reported.

Retirement Savings

What is the CARES Act and how does it affect my retirement savings?

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act recently signed into law provides more than $2 trillion to individuals and businesses and provides other financial assistance as compensation for those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. It includes several changes to retirement accounts/plans.

If you experience adverse financial consequences due to being quarantined, furloughed, laid off or having work hours reduced and/or being unable to work due to a lack of childcare, you may request penalty-free distributions of up to $100,000 for qualifying coronavirus-related reasons under the CARES Act. CARES Act distributions are more favorable than hardship withdrawals – because:

- Tax on the income from the withdrawal may be paid over a three-year period.
- Participants may repay the amount withdrawn to an eligible retirement plan within three years
- Repayments will not be subject to the retirement plan contribution limits
- All contribution sources (other than money purchase pension plan sources) will be available

For additional information on withdrawal and loan changes under the CARES Act, please log in to the Fidelity website at www.netbenefits.com. Go to the Quick Links drop down menu and select “Loans and Withdrawals” for more information. You can also call the Fidelity Retirement Benefits line at 1-800-343-0860 and ask to speak with someone who can provide more information about penalty-free CARES distributions.