

March 19, 2020

## **Best practices for Maine's Employers for Communications to Immigrant Staff Related to COVID-19**

In this unprecedented time, thank you for your efforts to help protect the health and well-being of your staff, at the same time that you grapple with the future of your businesses.

For employers with immigrant staff, the following suggestions may help ensure clear communication of all public health and human resources information, and information relevant specifically to immigrants. **Please:**

- **Use multiple modes of communication**, including email, printed materials such as handouts, and texting with links to online resources. Texting or using WhatsApp may be the best way to successfully reach many of your immigrant employees.
- **Translate all communications related to COVID-19 public health information or your organization's responses as a result, into your immigrant staff's first languages.** Do this even if you feel your staff has a functional level of spoken English, to be sure they don't miss any critical information.
- **Share multilingual sources of COVID-19 public health information and updates on health protocols.**
  - **FACT SHEETS in multiple languages** are on Maine CDC's website: [Acoli/Acoli](#), [عربي /Arabic](#), [English](#), [French/Français](#), [Haitian Creole/Kreyòl Ayisyen](#), [Khmer/ខ្មែរ](#), [Kirundi/Ikirundi](#), [Lingala](#), [Portuguese/Português](#), [Somali/Soomaali](#), [Spanish/Español](#), [Swahili/Kiswahili](#), [Vietnamese/Tiếng Việt](#) . Maine CDC may update their translated materials periodically.
  - The City of Lewiston, with Maine CDC, have **videos** available in several languages with Maine-specific information (more languages are in the works and will be posted [here](#)):
    - English - <https://youtu.be/s8hlelltNmw>
    - French - <https://youtu.be/mUp-8xTmHs>
    - Kirundi - <https://youtu.be/VKf2NBZ0amA>
    - Maay Maay - <https://youtu.be/bk5GPk4-imA>
    - Portuguese - <https://youtu.be/JMPf3K3FnMQ>
    - Somali - <https://youtu.be/z1IsAjqGEIA>

- **Make sure that information you share about HR policies and your business’s current and potential future responses to COVID-19’s impact is actually understood**, including policies about time off to care for children, elderly parents, or staying home when sick, and how your organization will be applying sick leave, PTO, etc. **Just conveying that information may not be enough – speak with your employees to make sure they understand it. Use interpreters or bilingual staff to be absolutely sure, and encourage employees to ask questions.**
- **Reassure your staff that USCIS (Immigration) has assured that seeking preventative care or treatment for COVID-19 will not cause any “public charge” problems for them, and Immigration will not be going to doctors’ offices or hospitals.**
- **Alert your staff that all employees who have legal work authorization are eligible to ask for unemployment compensation (UI) if you have to lay them off, regardless of their immigration status. Receiving UI will not cause any “public charge” problems for them.**
- **Let staff know that if you lay them off because of COVID-19’s effects on your business, but hope to be able to rehire them when this crisis abates, they may qualify for unemployment without needing to seek other full time work (which may not be possible to find).**
- **Let staff know that no one will be fired simply because they ask for COVID-19 related help/time off to care for themselves or a sick family member who needs care, or for a child no longer in school.**

MeBIC is hearing from immigrant communities that some employees are afraid that asking their employers about policies around their situation at home may cost them their jobs. Their fear of talking with their managers may lead employees to come into work when they should be self-quarantining instead, putting coworkers at risk.

## **FURTHER RESOURCES:**

### **For written translators or spoken language interpreters:**

- **House of Languages:** (207) 423-9962
- **Catholic Charities Language Partners:** (207) 523-2700

### **For telephonic spoken-language interpretation:**

- **Language Line Solutions**

Please contact Beth Stickney at [bstickney@mainebic.org](mailto:bstickney@mainebic.org) with any questions or for further information.