



Safe Conduct of Essential Research Activities

Development and Oversight of Essential Research Safety Plans

It is expected that each research group approved to conduct [essential research](#), will develop and maintain a response plan that defines levels of essential work and the process for scaling up or down in response to official guidance (i.e. University response to state and local directives).

The plan should outline the approach for managing operations while following safety practices such as social distancing, staggered work shifts to reduce group size, remote work and other exposure-reducing measures. Communication and monitoring of these practices should be described.

The department or unit head should review and approve the plan prior to initiation of work.

College/Department Support for Reducing Exposure

It is important that unit leadership take action to support basic infection control prevention measures through [awareness training](#), COVID-19 awareness [posters](#), and the provision of supplies necessary for hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

- Supply soap and paper towels for handwashing sinks in laboratories and all work areas. If soap and running water are not immediately available, provide alcohol-based hand rubs containing at least 60% alcohol. Post [signs encouraging hand hygiene and other measures](#) in common areas of buildings.
- Supply facial tissues in common areas and provide cloth face coverings, “nuisance” dust masks, or similar items to encourage respiratory etiquette.

Actively encourage staff to monitor their health status and stay home if they are ill. If staff come to work ill, request that they go home. If staff are asymptomatic but have had a significant exposure to someone who is ill, they should communicate this to their Principal Investigator/Supervisor and obtain approval before coming to work. Communicate the expectation and support for this approach to Principal Investigators/Supervisors.

In campus facilities where research is active, ensure that [F&S BSWs](#) are cleaning the facility frequently using enhanced cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces. In facilities or rooms where BSWs do not clean, supply occupants with [EPA-approved cleaners/disinfectants](#) so they can wipe down frequently touched surfaces. Communicate the expectation that regular cleaning/disinfecting of frequently touched surfaces is part of standard operating practice.

Provide additional resources as needed to help researchers avoid shared use of equipment such as desks, phones, computers, and other office equipment. If sharing must occur, supply EPA-approved cleaners/disinfectants so equipment can be disinfected before and after use. For equipment that is not easily cleaned and disinfected, evaluate covering it with material that can withstand treatment. For example, install wipeable keyboard covers on shared keyboards.

For shared areas where people normally congregate, such as large shared office spaces, develop and communicate a policy to limit the number of people in the space. In some cases, spaces such as break



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rooms may need to be closed to prevent congregation. For shared office areas, separate desks/work spaces to allow physical distancing of at least 6 feet.

Post signs on elevators that limits occupancy to a single person.

Evaluate common use corridors and stairways for the ability to pass another person while maintaining adequate physical distancing. For narrow passageways, consider limiting to a one-way flow of foot traffic if practicable. However, in case of an emergency requiring a building evacuation, do not block egress or lock stairwell doors. Emergency evacuations would supersede social distancing foot traffic management.

Researcher Implementation of Safe Policies and Practices

Communicate all operational changes to staff

Laboratory staff should consider the operational rules developed to be an extension of the [laboratory safety plan](#), and supervisors should make sure all members of the lab understand what is expected. Start by assigning everyone the online training [COVID-19 Guidance for Essential Workers](#). Hold regular virtual check-in meetings with all staff to determine if there are issues or questions.

Reduce presence of people in the laboratory/other shared facilities

Conduct as much essential research-related activity at home as possible, with one-on-one and group meetings conducted virtually via Skype, Zoom or similar technology. If faculty and/or staff must conduct research activities in laboratories or shared spaces, establish staggered shifts either for people to come in individually or in reduced numbers at the same time. In cases where multiple people need to work on-site, consider having the same people come in together so it limits the exposure potential between different people and the entire research team.

Physical distancing

Evaluate all areas of the laboratory/facility with the intention of maintaining a minimum of 6 feet of separation between people at all times. This includes office spaces. Limit occupancy in small rooms to a single person. Rearrange workstations and tasks as necessary to maintain adequate distance. When distance is not possible, consider eliminating the activity, or staggering when it is done. Keep in mind – the most efficient way to work may not be the safest in the current situation. If the activity is essential to the work and must be done onsite, construct physical barriers between people using materials such as heavy curtains or plexiglass shields.

Evaluate foot traffic flow in and out of as well as inside the laboratory/facility. Use one-way traffic patterns in narrow aisle ways in rooms. Designate an entry and exit point into hallways and corridors. Post signage to provide instruction.



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Cleaning and disinfection of shared equipment and high touch surfaces

Decontaminate high touch areas such as door knobs, light switches, desks, and tables in laboratories and related rooms at the start of work and before you leave for the day. Communicate this expectation to all staff working onsite.

Avoid the use of shared equipment, including office equipment, if possible. This is especially important for anything worn on the head or in contact with the face such as headsets, microscopes, or other equipment with eyepieces. When equipment must be shared, it should be cleaned and disinfected frequently. If the equipment involves head/face contact, it must be cleaned and disinfected between users. For equipment that is not easily cleaned and disinfected, consider covering it with material that can withstand treatment. For example, install wipeable keyboard covers on shared keyboards.

Develop cleaning and disinfection protocols and communicate them to all staff.

- Evaluate the characteristics of the surfaces to be decontaminated
- Use [EPA-approved cleaners/disinfectants](#) appropriate to the surface material
- Follow manufacturer's instructions if available and reference [COVID-19 specific guidance from DRS](#) and the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#)
- Determine frequency of disinfection

Use of face masks and disposable gloves

CDC recommends that people working around others cover their nose and mouth with a cloth face cover/mask. [Guidance on the use and care of cloth facemasks is available from the CDC.](#) Another option would be single use disposable "nuisance" dust masks or similar.

The CDC does not recommend the use of disposable gloves for general activities. The virus can be spread by contact with contaminated hands – gloved or ungloved – and a person's nose or mouth. Frequent handwashing is the best protection from that type of exposure. If someone regularly wears gloves to protect themselves from hazardous materials, they should continue to do so. Once their work is complete, they should remove their gloves and wash their hands. Gloves used for working with hazardous materials and other potentially contaminated personal protective equipment should not be worn outside the lab/facility into public spaces.

Working Alone

Personal security is as important as personal health. In a normal situation, working alone is discouraged. The basic safety rules for working alone still apply:

- Prior approval from the PI/supervisor is required



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- Work with highly hazardous materials should be prohibited
- Work with equipment that would normally require more than one person for safe operation should be prohibited
- Implement a check in process between colleagues or supervisor to monitor when someone arrives and when they leave, with periodic check ins if they will be working alone for an extended period