

Continuity for the Phased Re-opening of Campus Research

UTHSC's campus administration continues to monitor, closely, the COVID-19 situation. The following directive represents the current institutional guidance for the phased re-opening of the campus research enterprise. At such time as reliable antibody testing, and information on where COVID-19 falls on the immunity spectrum becomes available, UTHSC may implement additional practices to manage the activities of campus personnel.

Office of Research Services

All mission critical basic laboratory and research infrastructure support has continued to remain fully operational, even during the shelter at home phase (e.g., institutional cores, lab safety, research compliance committees, etc.). As well, all Office of Research services have continued to function, as usual, so that grant opportunities can be identified, contracts can be executed, and proposals can be written, edited and submitted, to name a few.

If you have any questions, regarding a specific Office of Research function or service, please communicate, directly, with the appropriate leadership. Their contact information can be found on the Office of Research website: <https://uthsc.edu/research/index.php>

COVID19 Research Safety Training

Research Safety Affairs has prepared **mandatory** training for all research personnel working on campus. This training can be located on **Blackboard** and will appear under courses where you are: Student. If for some reason it is not found there, it can be located using the search term "COVID19 Lab Re-opening for Researchers". The training content reviews OSHA risk classifications for work, CDC guidance and instructions for the application of social distancing guidelines and the proper use of PPE. PPE requirements for most employees will be limited to facemasks and the standard precautions that accompany laboratory work based on risk assessment (see below). Some researchers with additional responsibilities in high risk settings, such as local clinical care facilities, will need to wear a more protective N95 respirator, while working on campus.

Students, Staff, and Faculty

1. Masks are required at all times, while on campus (see [Use of Facemasks and Personal Protective Equipment](#)).
2. Researchers with additional responsibilities in high risk settings, such as local clinical care facilities, will need to wear a more protective N95 respirator (see [Use of N95 Respirators](#)) while working on campus.
3. A minimum 6ft social distancing rule will remain in effect, at all times.
4. A prohibition on large format gatherings (greater than 10 people) will be maintained, until further notice. This includes, but is not limited to seminars, lab meetings etc.
5. Meetings of up to 10 people may occur, to the extent that 6ft social distancing can be maintained.
6. Whenever possible, however, all laboratory or large format meetings (e.g., compliance committees etc.) should continue to use platforms such as Zoom, etc.

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Basic Laboratory and Campus Logistics

1. PIs should prioritize which critical laboratory activities should begin and base these on initial limited laboratory personnel.
2. PIs should consider alternate work schedules to minimize the number of people in the laboratory, at any one time.
3. Make sure hand cleaning and disinfecting supplies are readily available, prior to lab reopening. This should include additional disinfecting supplies for the routine disinfection of offices and other work areas to be performed by the individuals occupying these areas. These disinfection practices (see [Routine Disinfection Practices](#)) are in addition to routine cleaning provided by housekeeping.
4. Ensure sufficient PPE is on hand, prior to lab reopening.
5. Keep in mind that orders for critical supplies may still be delayed.
6. Labs should prominently display instructions for proper hand washing (see [Handwashing](#)).

Physical Laboratory Logistics

1. Potential high-contact settings such as labs and other common research areas should continue to implement a minimum physical distancing measure of six feet in all directions.
 - PIs should submit a plan to their chair, in which they have reviewed their lab space to accommodate the required physical space between lab members at all times (this would represent the maximum number of personnel permitted in the lab, at any one time). For these determinations, PIs should use a minimum rule of 144sqft/person (12 x 12 ft square) to maintain adequate spacing.
2. Those over the age of 60, those with underlying health conditions, and others at heightened risk from COVID-19, should continue to limit their time in the lab common research resource areas.
3. Remote work and data management should continue whenever possible.

Hygiene

1. Laboratories should train, reinforce and monitor healthy hygiene practices:
 - A. All lab members should wash their hands on entering and before exiting the lab.
 - B. After washing hands, personnel must use appropriate PPE, for example, gloves, as dictated by the risk assessment of the tasks to be performed.
 - C. Laboratory members should wash hands between glove changes and when moving from “dirty” to “clean” areas of the lab (e.g., from the benchtop to a desk).
 - D. Activities that include, but are not limited to food, drink, and the use of cell phones or ear buds in any lab are prohibited.
2. Personnel should continue the usual practice of removing gloves before leaving the laboratory. Frequently touched surfaces in common areas such as doorknobs and elevator buttons are not to be handled with gloves. However, personnel should routinely wash hands after touching such surfaces.
 - Note: Remember that gloves are not a substitute for frequent hand washing.

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Research Staff Cleaning and Disinfection of Laboratory

1. Labs should intensify cleaning and disinfection efforts (see [Routine Disinfection Practices](#)): Labs should routinely practice decontaminating surfaces that were used for lab work or were frequently touched (benchtops, equipment buttons/handles/lids, drawer pulls, workstations, doorknobs, faucets, etc.). Such surfaces should be decontaminated between users with cleaners that the EPA has approved for other environmental surfaces, [such as an EPA-registered disinfectant](#), soap and water, or 70% ethanol solution (which must remain wet on the surface to be effective).
2. Surfaces for cleaning include, but are not limited to door handles, doorknobs, light switches, phones, keyboards for common computers, and common lab instruments and equipment, faucets, desktops, etc.

Facilities

Facilities will intensify the cleaning and disinfection of common non-laboratory research areas.

Graduate Student and Post-Doctoral Office Space

- Student and post-doctoral desk space in common offices should be arranged to maximize the space between students (144sqft/student). Student desks should be oriented, whenever possible, to face in the same direction (rather than facing each other) to reduce transmission caused from virus-containing droplets (e.g., from talking, coughing, sneezing).
- Student and post-doctoral desks in the laboratory must be factored in to the 144sqft per person accommodation.

When Laboratory Members are Sick

1. PIs should review and emphasize with lab personnel and students the actions individuals must take (see [Employee Self-Check](#)), including staying home when sick, appropriately covering coughs and sneezes, cleaning frequently touched surfaces, and washing hands often. This discussion should also highlight that staff and students are under no pressure to come to the lab if there are concerns about their health and safety. Any unresolved concerns should be discussed with their PIs supervisor, Human Resources (901.448.5600) or College Dean, as appropriate.
2. Personnel who are sick or who have had close contact with a sick individual (with symptoms consistent with COVID-19: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>) **must not** report to campus. Individuals who meet this criterion should:
 - Immediately inform their supervisor who, in turn, should inform campus administration (e.g., Executive Vice Chancellor's Office {901.448.4797}, Office of Research {901.448.7125}, College of Graduate Health Sciences {901.448.5538})
 - Seek the advice of their healthcare provider, as to the nature of their illness or illness exposure, and report that information to their supervisor

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3. Should a lab member become ill with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 (see [Notification of COVID-19 Positive Employees](#)), while on campus, the following steps for work area decontamination must be followed.
 - Report the illness to campus administration, and the Director of Research Safety Affairs and Chief Campus Safety Officer (901.448.7374).
 - Following the departure of a sick individual, wait at least 30 minutes before reoccupying the work area. (If possible, allow a 24 hour wait time, as per CDC recommendations.)
 - Don gloves and a facemask and disinfect all work surfaces in that individual's work area with a bleach solution or another EPA registered disinfectant. If such disinfectants are not available, the laboratory should contact Research Safety Affairs for assistance (901.448.7374). Be sure to allow adequate contact time for disinfection.
 - Cleaning materials used to wipe surfaces should be discarded as conventional trash.
 - Remove gloves using proper technique to avoid contact with the outside surface. Wash hands with soap and water after removing gloves.
 - Laboratory members should remain home and seek the advice of their healthcare provider, as to the true nature of their illness.

Adherence to Guidance

1. Upon request, Research Safety Affairs can provide a risk assessment to assist with the implementation of these guidelines in each lab.
2. Research Safety Affairs will monitor laboratories for adherence to the above guidance through regular laboratory visits.
3. Each lab's plan must address every element of the Continuity for the Phased Re-opening of Campus Research directive. (see [Principal Investigator Implementation Rubric](#)).
4. It is recommended each lab use the planning template developed by the Research Implementation Oversight Committee to ensure correct adherence to these guidelines. (see [Individual Laboratory Implementation Assessment](#)).