



COVID-19 Guidelines for Laboratory Personnel

(Faculty, Post-doctoral Scholars, Students, Staff)

The COVID-19 Workforce Safety Working Group provides these guidelines to assist UMMS Laboratory Personnel as they return to laboratories to conduct research. The guidelines are intended to reduce the potential risk of COVID-19 transmission in the laboratory setting. Additional general guidance for minimizing the risk of COVID-19 transmission at work is provided in the UMMS Guidelines for Employee Return to Work and Standards for Prevention of Workplace Transmission of SARS-CoV-2. Laboratories already approved to do COVID-19 related research should continue to use best practices approved by the Institutional Biosafety Committee, and should ensure that all returning laboratory personnel follow these practices.

These guidelines are based on best practices in effect as of the date of this document and will be updated as new information is available or the situation changes. All UMMS policies and protocols relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic are posted on the UMMS COVID-19 website, <https://umassmed.edu/coronavirus/>. Questions about these guidelines should be directed to our UMMS Director of Infection Control at infection.control@umassmed.edu.

Highlights

- All UMMS laboratory personnel will undergo initial screening for SARS-CoV-2 prior to returning to work. No laboratory personnel will be cleared to return to work before being screened, with a negative result on the screening test.
- All UMMS laboratory personnel will be required to self-monitor and report the presence or absence of symptoms of COVID-19 **every day**, beginning on the **first day of return to work**. Laboratory personnel may self-report using an app on a smartphone, or on the IT portal.
- All laboratory personnel must remain home if sick. If laboratory personnel report any symptoms of COVID-19 to colleagues or managers, they must be told to stay at home and not come to work. If laboratory personnel become sick while at work, managers must send them home and instruct them to contact Employee Health or Student Health Services, as appropriate.
- Social distancing and adherence to the universal mask policy at all times is **our collective responsibility**. Each lab must create and foster a culture that ensures adherence to these workplace safety policies. Laboratory managers should post signs to remind laboratory personnel of this responsibility.
- Each laboratory Principle Investigator (PI) will develop a Return to Work plan for their lab prior to the return of their individual team.

Guiding principles

- **It's up to all of us to create a safe environment for return**
 - Each lab PI/manager must enforce safe practices and policies in the lab; this is critical to preventing the spread of SARS-CoV-2 in the workplace/lab when we return.
 - All laboratory personnel must adhere to all social distancing, universal mask and hand hygiene policies, and must in turn keep colleagues accountable to these policies.
 - Each lab PI/manager will be asked to post signs that help remind teams to keep masks on, keep six feet from others, avoid congregating in groups, and wash hands frequently. Links to signs that can be used are provided at the end of this document/guideline.
- **Encourage dialogue and communication: ask your teams to speak up if there are issues**
 - Each lab PI/manager should work to create a culture of safety in reporting issues.
 - Ask your teams to speak up if they have concerns, or if they see opportunities for improvement.
 - Check in with your teams regularly, to see how the return is going; encouraging improvement will help keep the team safe and keep the research moving forward.
 - Encourage your teams to speak up if they are not well; and reinforce that it's necessary to go home if sick.
- **Be nimble and flexible with regard to work hours/scheduling**
 - Encourage laboratory personnel to work shifts that allow maximal social distancing.
 - Consider flexible schedules for laboratory personnel with childcare concerns related to COVID-19.
 - Recognize that we may need to scale back if we see infections spreading in the workplace.

Create a plan for Return to Work (RTW) for your laboratory

- Each PI will be required to develop a plan for RTW, utilizing the template posted at <https://umassmed.edu/coronavirus/return-to-work-resources/>
- RTW plans will address the principles listed below and may be reviewed upon request by Dean Lane and/or Vice Provost Green.

Create a lab schedule that allows social distancing

- Use an online calendar or other means of letting lab members know who will be present in lab space at any given time, and to keep a record of lab occupancy.
- Minimize the number of people in each laboratory room or open office space at any one time; a distance of six feet between members of your team is required.
- Be present in the lab only as long as necessary for laboratory work.
- Work remotely whenever possible.
- Conduct lab meetings by Zoom.
- Distribute a list of duties to be performed by critical personnel, with location and designated time of day for such duties indicated.
- Prioritize essential vs non-essential tasks.

Create a safe environment for breaks from work

- Taking breaks for meals involves removing a mask/face-covering, and this may pose a risk of transmission of SARS-CoV-2 while eating.
- To minimize the risk of transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from asymptomatic individuals, any of the following options can be used, and should be discussed with lab directors. Lab directors will work with their teams to oversee and enforce best practices at work.
 - Use of outdoor seating areas for breaks or meals is encouraged, whenever possible.
 - Masks should be removed only while eating.
 - Avoid prolonged breaks/meals (15 minutes or more) without a mask in break rooms/lunch areas.
 - Take breaks and meals in staggered shifts, as organized by their team/unit managers
 - Maintain at least a six foot distance between individuals.
 - Clean break room tables before and after use. Create a schedule for members of the lab to contribute to cleaning of the space.
 - Wash hands before break and on return to the lab.

Create a laboratory-specific space plan to maintain at least six feet between researchers at all times

- If maintaining six feet between lab members is not possible, stagger schedules.
- Stagger workspaces to accommodate six feet of physical spacing. Whenever possible, workspaces should not be directly across a bench from each other; if this is not possible, use a plexiglass barrier between workstations.
- Whenever laboratory circumstances allow, each person should have their own workspace and own set of commonly used tools and reagents, especially items such as laboratory notebooks, pens, etc., that might be used with bare hands or that are not easily decontaminated.
- Move equipment to allow at least six feet between users.
- Create traffic patterns to minimize passage of laboratory personnel within six feet of each other.

Create a plan for safe practices in the lab

- Assume that everyone you see is potentially infected, including yourself, and use appropriate precautions, including not touching your face and washing your hands often. Transmission can occur from people without symptoms.
- Wash hands with soap upon entering and before leaving the lab and touching shared accessory devices like phones (use speaker phone if possible).
- Keep distance of at least six feet from other people.
- In keeping with institutional practice, masks are required at all times. Face coverings must not interfere with PPE, e.g. eye shields, required for safety and must be compatible with all safety requirements. Wash hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizing gel before and after using ANY face covering.
- Using a face covering prevents us from getting others sick; always encourage your team members to remind others to keep the nose and mouth covered with a face mask, to prevent transmission from asymptomatic or presymptomatic individuals.
- Gloves, cloths, or disposable towels will be used when handling common reagent bottles, laboratory equipment, and cabinet handles.

Regularly clean and disinfect to reduce the spread of COVID-19

- Clean and disinfect all laboratory and office work areas regularly. Make a list of high touch areas (e.g., desk, phones, computers, printers, tables, chairs, refrigerators/freezers, door handles) and clean daily, between uses, or when noticeably unclean.
- All bench spaces and equipment, and especially those shared by multiple users, must be disinfected before and after each use.
 - Use only EPA approved cleaners, sanitizers and disinfectants. The following are recommended: 70 percent alcohol solution or 10 percent bleach/water solution, or other EPA-registered disinfectant for use against SARS-CoV-2.
- Minimize harmful chemical exposures when cleaning and disinfecting. Wear disposable gloves and discard after each use. Clean hands immediately after gloves are removed.
- Wear eye protection when there is a potential for splash or splatter to the face.
- Gowns or aprons are recommended to protect personal clothing, especially if using a bleach solution for disinfecting.
 - Special care should be taken to disinfect equipment that makes direct physical contact with skin, including eyepieces for microscopes, touch pads, etc.
- Use disposable tissues, Kimwipe, etc. to touch surfaces that cannot be disinfected and when gloves are not available.

Interactions with others outside the lab

- Contact with other labs should be made via phone or electronic means except in cases of extreme emergency.
- Departments and research units should develop plans for package deliveries that minimize contacts with delivery personnel. Transfer of items should be arranged by leaving them in a designated area rather than handing them over in person.

Contact numbers for deliveries:

Medical School: 508-856-2883

Sherman Center: 774-455-3505

- Use of shared facilities and other labs' equipment should be pre-arranged. Be sure that all users know lab sign-in procedures.

Animal medicine guidelines (for all researchers using the animal medicine facility)

Please Note: An important update from prior practice is a **new requirement** to wear N95 masks while conducting procedures that involve two or more staff who are in close proximity (< six feet) during the procedure. Please see below for specifics. Environmental Health & Safety will perform mask fit testing for individuals who have not yet been fit tested.

- **Social distancing**
 - Always keep a six-foot distance from others when entering and leaving the facility (if needed, step aside to let others pass by you).
 - When in common areas, maintain a six-foot distance from others.
 - In PPE gowning area, limit entry/exit to one person at a time (at the entry/exit site).
 - Within the gowning area, a temporary barrier will allow two people to gown at a time.
 - Floors will be marked at six-foot intervals in areas where PPE is donned/taken off.

- **Disposal of PPE**

- Continue safe practices for donning and doffing of PPE.
- Continue usual safe practices for disposal of PPE, and notify facilities if disposal containers need to be emptied.
- If a mask must be changed, ensure that hands are cleaned before and after changing the mask, and ensure that proper six-foot social distancing is maintained when changing the mask.

Scheduling and performing procedures:

- An important update from prior practice is a **new requirement** to wear an N95 mask* while conducting procedures that involve two or more staff who are in proximity (< six feet) during the procedure. This requirement is to address situations in which multiple individuals need to be in close proximity such as complex surgical or imaging studies.
- There will be a maximum of two persons at a time permitted in the holding and procedure rooms.
- An online scheduling process, much like that used in BSL-3 spaces, will be developed, so that investigators can plan for procedures.
- Inform your supervisor if there are concerns or issues with scheduling procedures after research staff return.
- Current practices for cleaning the holding and procedure rooms are appropriate for SARS-CoV-2 concerns and will be continued.
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- **General best practices**

- Communicate with team members regarding the importance of social distancing and use of PPE.
- Post signage and discuss with your teams the importance of staying home when ill.
- Consistent with Universal Mask Policy, a surgical mask must be worn in ALL areas of the facility, however there are some important enhanced procedures:
 - Masks can only be worn in one barrier facility daily (i.e., the same mask cannot be worn from LRB into Sherman).
 - Once you enter Animal Medicine, the same mask can be worn in that facility.
 - Certain areas will remain unchanged: ABSL-2, ABSL-3, Quarantine, and NHP rooms. These areas require de-gowning and putting on a clean mask when exiting the holding room or biocontainment suite.

**Staff, researchers, students who have not been fit tested for N95 masks must contact Environmental Health & Safety for fit testing before performing procedures. EH&S can be reached at 508-856-3985. Appointments for fit testing can be scheduled quickly, to accommodate this requirement.*

Resources to utilize in the lab

The CDC has resources, posters and fliers that can be used in the lab to remind laboratory personnel of important policies.

Stay at home if sick poster:

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/316129-B-StayHomeFromWork_Poster.pdf

How to protect yourself and others:

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention-H.pdf

What to do if you are at higher risk:

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/COVID19-What-You-Can-Do-High-Risk.pdf

Keep calm and wash your hands:

www.cdc.gov/handwashing/pdf/keep-calm-wash-your-hands_11x17.pdf

DPH website containing many posters, including some in many different languages:

www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-printable-fact-sheets - visual-communication-tool-

Stop the spread of germs:

www.mass.gov/doc/stop-the-spread-of-germs-respiratory-diseases-like-flu-and-covid-19/download

Social Distancing:

www.mass.gov/doc/help-prevent-covid-19-with-social-distancing/download

There is also a wonderful link with a lot of videos that can be shared

www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL54knIBH64ACt7IFFgE8laWRs-TQ9b-rs