

## **Best Practices for Research Mentors during COVID-19**

- Frequently and regularly communicate expectations and provide realistic evaluations of trainee/staff member performance/progress
- Notify trainees/staff members about scheduling of lab meetings, one-on-one meetings, and other lab social events. Meetings will be virtual unless absolutely necessary.
- If a disagreement arises, the parties involved will follow the conflict resolution pathways defined below. Once the conflict is resolved, there will be no retribution for the disagreement/misunderstanding.
- Lab safety plans with details regarding the provision of PPE, social distancing measures, and population density reduction strategies must be shared with all lab personnel
- Take COVID-19 training before returning to campus
- Complete the UAB Healthcheck every day
- Provide remote work options for trainees/staff members when feasible. Ensure that required remote capabilities (digital equipment, VPN, etc.) are available. Determine a mutually agreed upon plan for routine monitoring and reporting of progress prior to beginning remote work.
- In instances where 6-foot distancing is impractical (training, collaborative experiments), the mentor must develop the safest possible protocol, emphasizing PPE required by researchers involved (e.g. gloves, mask, face shield, lab coats, goggles). All parties will be asked to agree to the protocol prior to the initiation of the experiment. The training experience will not proceed unless all parties agree to the conditions.
- If a mentor observes researchers who do not comply with established safety measures they should address the issue with the noncompliant individual. Alternatively, they may contact [the anonymous UAB ethics hotline](#).
- In the event of a conflict
  - Communication between mentors and mentees must be open and honest, especially regarding areas of safety, anxiety, or disagreements.
  - If a mentee expresses safety concerns about a training or research situation, mentors will make reasonable accommodations to address concerns raised by mentees. To reach an agreement, the mentor and mentee must review the research plan and associated safety measures. If an agreeable accommodation cannot be reached, the discussion should be elevated to include one or more of the following:
    - [UAB Ombudsperson](#)
    - Department/Division leadership
    - Program directors/postdoctoral office
  - If agreement cannot be reached, then the mentor-mentee relationship may be ended.
- If the mentor becomes aware that the trainee is COVID +, the mentor will not share this information with others, rather, contact tracing and appropriate communication will be managed by the Department leadership and health officials. Mentor should send trainee home and ask them to register symptoms on Healthcheck and to contact Student Health for guidance on quarantine/isolation.
- If a trainee is isolated with a positive COVID-19 test or quarantined due to a COVID exposure, the mentor will consult with the trainee to determine whether remote research/learning is feasible. If so, they will formulate a clear plan for work expectations. If not, no research/learning activities will be expected during isolation/quarantine.

## **Welcoming new lab members or rotation students**

- When new members join a lab, mentors will clearly communicate research expectations and identify personnel who will train the new researcher, provide contact information for that person, provide lab safety plan, and provide detailed outlines of how safety measures will be enforced and what PPE will be required.
- Discuss expectations with new researchers up front. Make it clear to the new researcher that current conditions require efficient, minimized time on campus and in the lab. Activities that are not required to be done in the lab should be conducted remotely.

- Amend lab safety plans to indicate the presence of a new scientist
- Other lab personnel who are asked to train the new researcher will be asked to agree to required conditions prior to the beginning of the training experience. The training experience will not proceed unless both parties agree to the conditions.

### **Best Practices for Research Mentees during COVID-19**

- Provide progress updates to mentor(s) on a regular basis in lab meetings and/or in one-on-one meetings
- Take COVID-19 training before returning to campus
- Complete the UAB Healthcheck every day
- Adhere to lab safety plans and wear appropriate PPE, maximize social distancing, and minimize time in the lab when not conducting bench top experiments
- If opting for remote work, the trainee/staff member will be responsible for obtaining internet access and report progress to mentor regularly (with a schedule agreed upon by mentor and mentee).
- If a mentee observes researchers who do not comply with established safety measures they can communicate with that person, with the person's supervisor, or with department leadership. Alternatively, they may contact [the anonymous UAB ethics hotline](#).
- In instances where 6-foot distancing is impractical (training, collaborative experiments), the trainee/staff member must adhere to the mentor-prescribed safest protocol, including use of appropriate PPE (e.g. gloves, mask, face shield, lab coats, goggles). If the trainee/staff member is uncomfortable or unable to perform the experiment, follow the process described under conflict resolution.
- If a trainee has underlying health concerns that prevent their return to research, they should contact Disability Support Services (DSS). If DSS cannot reach acceptable accommodations, the trainee is advised to follow the conflict resolution pathway as indicated below.
- In the event of a conflict
  - Communication between the mentor and mentee should be honest and open, even in discussion of conflicts/disagreement.
  - Trainees will make reasonable accommodations to address concerns raised by their mentor.
  - If a mentee expresses safety concerns about a training or research situation, the mentor and mentee must review the research plan and associated safety measures. If an agreeable accommodation cannot be reached, the discussion should be elevated to include one or more of the following:
    - [UAB Ombudsperson](#)
    - Department/Division leadership
    - Program directors/postdoctoral office
  - If none of the above measures provide a reasonable accommodation that benefits research progress and mitigates safety issues, the mentor-mentee relationship may end. If changing labs is not a desirable solution, then trainees have the right to take a leave of absence for up to one calendar year.
    - During a leave of absence, trainees will not be paid a stipend, tuition, or health insurance. Trainees interested in taking a leave of absence must communicate with their mentor, program director, and program staff to initiate this process.
- If a mentee experiences COVID-19 symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19, they must report their symptoms in Healthcheck and alert their supervisor. Additionally, they will follow all medical provider recommendations and cooperate with testing guidelines.
- If a trainee is isolated due to a positive COVID-19 test or quarantined due to a COVID exposure, the trainee will consult with the mentor to determine whether remote research/learning is feasible. If so, they will formulate a clear plan for work expectations. If not, no research/learning activities will be expected during isolation/quarantine.
- If a trainee serving as a teaching assistant (TA) or adjunct experiences COVID-19 symptoms or tests positively for COVID-19, they must alert their TA advisor and work with the advisor to either secure temporary coverage of their course(s) or activate remote learning for the course (if possible). A

COVID+ diagnosis will not affect a trainees's stipend while on quarantine/isolation unless the trainee needs to take a leave of absence due to extended illness.

- Rotating students or newly hired researchers/postdocs will communicate clearly and frequently with prospective mentors. Until a mentor is selected, their theme director, program director, or department chair will serve in the role of mentor as indicated in the section above.