

Laboratory and Research Space Considerations for Code Yellow

Updated May 17, 2020

Note – The COVID-19 pandemic presents a complex and dynamic environment. This document provides the best information and guidance to date but is subject to change as conditions warrant.

As there are many different types of laboratories and research spaces on campus, supervisors/Pis should adapt the considerations below to their units. An [Operational Plan Template](#) is available for modification and use. Prior to any return, the operational plan must be approved by the chair or division director and dean, and all personnel must complete the [COVID-19 Assessment Tool](#), a symptom and exposure tracker.

- **Supervisor/PI should determine research roles/responsibilities** and clearly define what needs to be accomplished within the lab and to laboratory members.
 - Personnel who can be assigned to complete computational or data-based work should be assigned to work remotely following the UAB [Telecommuting Guidelines](#).
 - Personnel who are needed to work in the lab on campus should be assigned work schedules that allow for 6-foot social distancing.
 - The PI should prepare a work schedule on an accessible platform for the group (e.g., shared online calendar) that allows for 6-foot social distancing.
- **Trainee and Laboratory Personnel** considerations for a safe return to work.
 - Graduate students and postdocs are permitted to initiate and continue studies on site if their work requires it.
 - All work capable of being conducted remotely should be done so, including non-experimental work, data analysis and writing, laboratory means, and administrative support tasks.
 - Undergraduates are only permitted in research labs with approval by the program director and responsible mentor.
 - To the extent possible, all personnel will keep their powered up, Bluetooth-enabled cell phones on their persons while on campus.
 - All personnel should let faculty mentors or supervisors know when they are in lab and when they leave.
- **Each bay** can hold a maximum of 2 people at a time. Workstations should be offset to enable 6-foot social distancing, which is approximately ~1 person per 150-250 ft² of space depending on the individual room layout and density with furniture, benches, and equipment.
- Utilize **“Zoom” meetings** vs. meeting in the lab if not required for experiment or training review. If you must meet in person, maintain 6-foot social distancing, and wipe down all surfaces, chairs, and equipment after each use.
- **Break Areas:** No food or drink is allowed in the wet lab/experiment space at any time unless part of an experimental protocol or study. Work with your neighbors to establish maximum number of individuals and schedule when different groups should utilize break areas. Utilize conference rooms and outdoor spaces when possible.
- **Shared Departmental Equipment:** Employees must sign up in advance to use. No more than one employee may use the equipment/space at a time, unless an exception is noted (e.g., autoclaves may be 6 feet apart, thus acceptable for two employees to be in the space). Wipe down equipment after use.
- **Shared Cell Culture/Research Space:** Employees must sign up in advance to use. No more than one employee may use the space at a time, unless the space allows for appropriate 6-foot social distancing between employees (larger cell culture spaces with multiple cabinets). If possible, move common/shared lab equipment (centrifuges, PCR cyclers, balances, etc.) to a single bench or single area of the lab to minimize lab personnel contact. Only one person may use the equipment at a time.

- **Core Facilities:** Institutional Research Core resources may be accessed only after consultation with Core Facility Directors and, if necessary, under Core personnel supervision who will be responsible for ensuring standard operating procedures, including proper disinfection. Core facilities will have procedures in place that should be adhered to.
- **Activities Requiring More Than One Person Working Within 6 Feet of Each Other:** Some activities may require personnel to work within the 6-foot social distancing guidelines. In those situations, it must be confirmed that there are no other alternatives to keep personnel separated by 6 feet. Please note that there will inevitably be incidental circumstances that do not meet the 6-foot social distancing guideline (e.g. passing in the hall, on the sidewalk outside, at the bathroom sink, in an animal room or other room with high-density equipment). It is critical to keep those interactions to a minimum, but that kind of interaction is probably not a major source of transmission. However, the CDC currently defines a “close contact” as being “within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes.” Since everyone is considered infected, anyone that must work with someone for 15 minutes or more within 6 feet of each other is considered a “close contact.” If any of those individuals subsequently becomes symptomatic, those “close contacts” should contact the relevant oversight group. Employees should contact [Employee Health](#), (205) 934-3675. Students should contact [Student Health Services](#), (205) 934-3580.
- Some lab personnel must come in close contact with external individuals frequently. Arrange “no contact” delivery. If there is someone in the lab, packages are left outside the lab/near the entrance to the lab. Deliverer stays while lab individual picks up the package. Lab member gives permission for Deliverer to sign for the lab.

If you feel there is a situation not addressed above, or you feel you are being asked to do something that does not provide adequate infectious risk control, consult your PI and HR representative. Utilize the advice of support departments including [Environmental Health and Safety](#) to define a proper SOP for dealing with that particular situation.

If you need special accommodations due to the COVID-19 pandemic or for any other reason, contact the [AWARE](#) Program at UAB. This program provides disability-management services when an employee’s job is affected by physical, mental, or emotional impairment.