Guidance for Laboratory Research Personnel

We gratefully acknowledge our colleagues at Yale University and UC Berkeley, whose communications to their research communities strongly influenced our own.

The World Health Organization has now declared the coronavirus outbreak a global pandemic, and Miami-Dade County has recorded its first confirmed case. We expect this outbreak to cause some degree of disruption to research activities. Research activities should continue as possible, as long as they are consistent with University guidance. Faculty and research staff should check the guidance frequently.

Please continue to monitor coronavirus.miami.edu for the most updated information.

Immediate Measures to Reduce Transmission of Infectious Disease

To reduce the potential transmission of the coronavirus (or other infectious diseases—colds flu, etc.) in the coming weeks, the university asks that all research labs take the following steps:

- **Require personnel who are feeling sick to stay home** until they no longer have symptoms
- **Remind all personnel to practice recommended sanitary measures**, including washing hands frequently, using hand sanitizer, avoiding touching their face, and covering coughs/sneezes with their elbows.
- **Explore and (where feasible) implement measures to reduce personnel density (“social distancing”) for lab/research staff.** For example, increasing spacing between individuals where possible to >6 feet, having personnel come to the lab in shifts, allowing every other bench to be unoccupied.
- **Consider opportunities for lab personnel to work remotely** - both to allow for social distancing, or in case they need to self-isolate on short notice. Have personnel test out remote setups before they are needed. The current recommended university platform is Microsoft Teams; other platforms (Skype, Zoom, Google Hangouts, etc) can be used if preferred and functional.
- **Increase routine disinfecting of laboratory and communal spaces**, including lab benches and chairs, equipment, common rooms, door handles, desks, etc.
- **Consider attending university meetings via phone or videoconference.** Additionally, most scientific conferences and other research community meetings are being cancelled or are permitting remote participation.
- **Consider cancelling or postponing field research trips**, as they present unique risks because of shared housing, shared dining spaces, and challenges in “sending someone home” should they become ill during an extended trip.
- **Monitor and follow university guidelines regarding academic and personal travel, both internationally and domestically.**
Long Term Planning for “Research Continuity”

Investigators and research managers should begin planning now, should it happen that research and campus operations need to continue with reduced or even remote staffing, if significant numbers of research staff or research support personnel become ill, or large-scale self-isolation is required. Any changes to research support unit operations will be communicated to all campuses.

Note: In no event should researchers take materials other than laptops, data storage devices, or similar devices offsite (e.g., to their homes) as a way to promote research continuity during a curtailment. All essential research must continue within the confines of appropriate laboratory space.

Assumptions to use for planning, should widespread COVID-19 communal transmission require campus support operations to be delivered remotely, or with reduced staffing due to illness. These are not guarantees, but are our best projections to date:

- The safety and the good health of our research workforce and our research animals will remain our highest priority.
- Assume that essential research infrastructure, such as power, air conditioning, and telecommunications, will be maintained.
- Assume that research administration and support units, such as the Office of Research Administration (ORA), Office of Technology Transfer (OTT), Office of the Vice Provost for Research (OVPR), Human Subjects Research Office (HSRO), Disclosures & Relationship Management (DRM), Research Compliance & Quality Assurance (RCQA), Office of Research Compliance Committees (IACUC, IBC, ESCRO), the Division of Veterinary Resources (DVR), and Environmental Health & Safety (EHS) will continue to provide services as required. These services may be slower and/or reduced in scope if the situation changes substantially.

Nevertheless, investigators should plan for the following possibilities:

- Be prepared for the possibility that some of your laboratory workforce to fall ill or be required to self-isolate.
- Be prepared to decontaminate the workspace of an ill researcher in your laboratory.
- Be prepared for core facilities and other fee-for-service resources to become slow, reduced in scope, or unavailable.
- Be prepared for critical supply orders to be delayed. Investigators should work with their unit leadership and/or building managers to coordinate essential deliveries.
- Be prepared for building or laboratory access to be curtailed, but not eliminated. The university will notify the affected communities as soon as possible. Assume that essential access for equipment maintenance and critical laboratory experiments will continue. Such access will be coordinated through Building Managers. Review your list of essential personnel.
• Be prepared that repairs performed by Facilities Services and other campus and non-campus service providers may be delayed.
• Be prepared that processing of visas by the federal government may be delayed, resulting in delayed appointments.

Steps you can take now to ensure continuity of critical functions in case of a severe outbreak:

• Identify procedures and processes that require regular personnel attention (e.g., cell culture maintenance, animal studies).
• Assess and prioritize critical laboratory activities. Create an accurate inventory of laboratory chemicals and sensitive laboratory instrumentation and equipment, and share this information with your building manager and EHS.
• Identify any research experiments that can be ramped down, curtailed, or delayed.
• Identify key personnel able to safely perform essential activities to insure the continuity of your laboratory’s research capability.
• Ensure that you have access to up-to-date email and telephone contact information for your critical staff.
• Cross-train research staff to substitute for others who may be out sick or unable to come to work.
  o Ensure staff have the appropriate, up-to-date training.
  o Encourage all researchers to be familiar with each other’s work if an absence would threaten the loss of experiments (such as which cells need transferring to new media, etc.)
• Coordinate with colleagues who have similar research activities to identify ways to ensure mutual support and coverage of critical activities.
• Review contingency plans and emergency procedures with researchers and staff.
• Maintain a sufficient inventory of critical supplies that may be impacted by global shipping delays. Inform your building manager if your lab relies on regularly-scheduled supplies such as liquid nitrogen, dry ice or helium. Coordinate those deliveries with building management.
• Check any remote control monitoring devices for critical equipment (e.g., -80°C freezers, liquid nitrogen storage dewars, incubators).
• Communicate significant planned absences and/or lab closures to unit business offices and other key administrative units.

Other safety considerations:

• Ensure that individuals performing critical tasks have been adequately trained and understand whom to contact with technical or safety questions.
• Avoid performing high-risk procedures alone. When working alone is necessary, exercise extreme caution.
• Ensure that research team members notify colleagues of their schedule when working alone for an extended period of time.
• Ensure that high-risk materials (radioactive, biohazards, chemicals) are properly secured.