

Guidance for Developing Return to Work Laboratory Plans

The [Committee on Reconstituting On-campus Research recently released a report](#) detailing the need for every faculty member or laboratory leader to develop a plan for resuming research in their laboratory. The objective of this guide is to help faculty and laboratory managers develop plans in accordance with the committee's recommendations.

Each Return-to-Work plan should include the following elements:

Physical Distancing

- ☐ All work that can be done remotely should be done remotely
- ☐ Limit the total number of people with access to each laboratory, as well as the density of people who can be in the laboratory at any given time. These limits should be established considering:
 - The type of work that is being conducted and how much a researcher needs to move around in the laboratory.
 - The Centers for Disease Control recommends **6 feet of separation for brief encounters**. Longer encounters require greater distancing.
 - For large laboratories, also consider
 - Establishing designated individual work areas that are separated by at least **6 feet**. The duration and type of the activity may require further distancing. Consider creating clear floor markings to indicate designated, individual work areas.
 - Establish traffic patterns (for example, one-way aisles) to minimize contact.
- ☐ Establish shifts to both minimize density at any given time and to create within the research group cohorts that have minimal overlap with one another. Consider the following approaches:
 - **Epidemiological approach:** 4 days in and 10 days out in two-week cycles.
 - **Weekly cycle:** 3 days in and 4 days out with a M-W group and Th-Su group.
 - **Alternate days:** MWF and TThSu.
 - Two non-overlapping shifts per day.

Laboratory Operations

- ☐ Establish a plan for ordering and receiving supplies. Consider:
 - Consolidating orders to minimize the number of deliveries.
 - Establishing responsibilities for wiping down and unpacking supplies upon receipt.
 - Designating a collection area for packaging materials to be removed from the lab area after packages have been opened.

- ☐ Reassess all safety hazards in the laboratory and create new standard operating procedures. These should include practices to limit the spread of COVID-19 but also to address new hazards introduced by reduced occupancy density in buildings and laboratories.
 - Maintain a log of all people in the lab (check-in and check-out) and their activities, stations and equipment.
 - Require the use of face coverings in addition to the gloves, safety goggles, and laboratory coats that are normally required for the research activity. Ensure that goggles and coats are not shared and are disinfected appropriately, and that researchers are properly trained in the use of masks and gloves.
 - Guidance can be found in [COVID-19 Glove Usage Guidance](#) sheet.
 - Require frequent handwashing and hand sanitization.
 - Address the safety hazards of working alone in a laboratory. Use the [Institute policy on working alone](#) to establish alternate processes like check-in and check-out with a buddy.
 - Notify the Division and alert the [Caltech Safety Office](#) when a risky experiment is scheduled.
 - Address the safety hazards of unattended experiments.
- ☐ In preparation for future emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic or an earthquake, establish a research continuity plan. Plans should describe critical functions, communication plans, and data and specimen backup strategies. Continuity planning resources are available at:
<http://www.emergencypreparedness.caltech.edu/ContinuityPlanning>
- ☐ In order to help minimize entry by staff inside research areas, centralize and consolidate hazardous waste and biohazardous waste collection areas.

Cleaning and Sanitizing Laboratory Surfaces

- ☐ Establish clear cleaning and disinfecting practices. Plans should address the cleaning of:
 - High-touch surfaces between shifts and should clearly establish responsibilities assigned to laboratory members and custodial staff.
 - Shared equipment between users and use.
 - Guidance can be found in the [Workstation Sanitation Protocol For Laboratory Areas](#).

Communication Plan

- ☐ Develop a robust communications plan that allows all individuals working in the laboratory to receive and read information in a timely manner.

Off Campus Research

- ☐ Research that is conducted in off-campus facilities, or requires field trips, etc. **should follow the same principles as required for buildings and laboratories.** Every faculty

member or laboratory leader who is responsible for such activities should **develop a plan** for each activity. Plans should be reviewed by the safety office, and **must be approved by the cognizant Division Chair** before any activity can begin.