Guidelines for COVID-19 prevention while working in the laboratory or other onsite research facilities

The Office of Research in collaboration with Environmental Health and Safety, provide the following guidelines for those research projects that meet the allowable criteria for carrying out research in a laboratory or other onsite research facility. Note that different restrictions exist for research involving human subjects.

Units may have their own more specific guidance document including any department- or School/College specific procedures for daily attestations of wellness. For reference, see documents from the School of Medicine.

Guidelines for laboratory personnel safety

1. **Never come to work at a laboratory or research facility if you are experiencing any symptoms of infection.** Your own department or School/College may have specific procedures for daily attestations of wellness. In particular, no one should come to work if they are beginning to experience any of the following symptoms:
   - Fever
   - Cough
   - Shortness of breath
   - Difficulty breathing
   - Respiratory symptoms
2. If you experience COVID-19 symptoms, are confirmed to have COVID-19, or have someone at home with COVID-19, stay home, contact your healthcare provider, and notify the EH&S Employee Health Center at emphlth@uw.edu.
3. If you come to work and start showing any possible symptoms of illness, you must leave the lab and inform your PI or supervisor.
4. Develop a personal transportation plan that minimizes proximity to other people. Consider cycling, walking, or driving instead of public transit.
5. Be present in the lab only as long as necessary for your experiment. Minimize time around other people.
6. **Assume everyone you see is infected, including yourself, and use appropriate precautions.** Some transmission may occur from people with no symptoms.

Guidelines for operating a safe laboratory or research facility

1. Create a lab schedule and adhere to it. This schedule should minimize the number of people in each laboratory room at any one time. This may require some people coming to the lab at times other than daytimes M-F. A shared google calendar or other online tool may be helpful.
   - Distribute a list of duties to be performed by critical personnel, with location and designated time of day for such duties indicated.
• Develop a means of signifying who is present in the lab space at any given time, preferably an online sign-in tool to minimize touching items such as a physical sign-in sheet, or other mechanism of controlling the number of people in the lab at the same time.

• Stagger break times to minimize contact between people in rooms used for eating or drinking.
  o Be sure to disinfect surfaces such as tables and chairs before and after using such facilities.
  o Cups, mugs, plates, and silverware must be washed with soap before and after use.
  o Wash your hands after using a break room.

2. Create safe spaces to maintain at least 6 feet between researchers at all times.

• Post a lab map inside the lab entryway with maximum room/bay occupancy to maintain social distancing.

• Small, narrow laboratories/facilities on the order of 100-150 sf can likely only accommodate one person at a time.

• Square or rectangle laboratories larger than 200 sf can possibly accommodate more, but keep the number to a minimum. If you cannot maintain at least 6 feet of social distance, revise the schedule and/or reconfigure the room.

• Note that depending on the research area, safety guidelines may require more than one person at any one time. In this case, it must be possible to maintain 6 feet distance at all times. Note: In situations where this is not possible, contact EH&S for guidance and get supervisor approval prior to conducting any work.

• Move equipment to create at least 6 feet between users.

• Use tape to mark out 6-foot spaces for high traffic areas or bottlenecks. If possible, set up one-way traffic zones to minimize interactions.

3. Create a plan for safe practices in the lab.

• Maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from other people. This is our best protection against COVID-19.

• In addition, wearing a mask, such as a cloth mask, can add another layer of protection. Masks can help protect others by containing respiratory droplets when the mask wearer coughs, sneezes or speaks. Surgical/medical masks should be reserved for healthcare providers who are on the front lines working to protect us all. There are shortages of these masks, and it is critically important that healthcare workers have the equipment they need to do their jobs. Cloth masks are not a replacement for surgical/medical masks, but as noted above, they do provide another layer of protection for those who can maintain 6 feet social distance standards. Note that some units are requiring cloth masks, please check for local requirements.
  • Hand hygiene before and after using ANY face covering is critical.
  • Follow the EH&S Guidance for Facemask Use for Preventing the Spread of COVID-19.

• Wash your hands with soap upon entering and before leaving the lab, and wash them after touching shared accessory devices like phones (use speaker-phone if possible).

• Minimize shared items (pens, notebooks, frequently used reagent bottles, etc.). As much as possible, each person should have their own.

• If it can be done safely, use paper towels or Kimwipes when handling common laboratory items, laboratory equipment and cabinet handles.

• Wipe or spray door handles with 70% ethanol (or other EPA-registered disinfectant) after use. See EH&S guidelines.

• Consider footwear and clothing as a possible transmission source. You should have a pair of shoes that you use for external use (including working in a laboratory/facility) that you do not
wear into your place of residence. Such shoes could be left just inside the door of your place of residence.

4. Create a plan for shared equipment. All shared equipment must be disinfected before and after each use.
   - Wear disposable gloves when cleaning and disinfecting. Discard (where supplies allow) or disinfect gloves after each use. Clean your hands immediately after gloves are removed. Continue to follow Lab PPE practices with regard to public places. Remove lab coats and gloves when leaving the lab.
   - Wear eye protection when there is a potential for splash or splatter to the face, or when surface contact is a possibility, e.g. microscopy work.
   - Lab coats, gowns or aprons are recommended to protect personal clothing.
   - Follow EH&S guidelines (and see below) for cleaning and disinfection of hard, non-porous surfaces.
   - 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, Kimwipes, etc. to touch surfaces that cannot be disinfected and when gloves are not available.

5. Create a plan for interactions with others outside the lab
   - Contact with other labs should be made via phone or electronic means except in cases of extreme emergency.
   - Transfer of items should be arranged by leaving them in the hallway or other designated area rather than handing them over in person.
   - Use of shared facilities and other labs’ equipment should be pre-arranged in order to avoid accidental contact. Be sure that all users know lab sign-in procedures.
   - Use precautions when entering a restroom, shared use facility, or other common areas. Call out to assess occupancy. Use a disposable towel or Kimwipe to touch door handles and faucets and wash your hands upon entering and leaving.

6. Create a plan in the event of a possible or confirmed case of COVID-19 among personnel in a lab
   - Notify the EH&S Employee Health Center immediately (emphlth@uw.edu or 206-685-1026). The identity of individuals who have or may have COVID-19 is handled as protected information.
   - EH&S will provide guidance on communicating to staff (as appropriate).
   - EH&S will notify individuals who had close contact with the ill person up to 48 hours prior to the development of symptoms.
   - EH&S will provide close contacts with public health recommendations that may include staying home and monitoring their health for 14 days.
   - EH&S will evaluate the locations where the person spent time on campus for enhanced cleaning and disinfection.

If everyone working in a laboratory or research facility uses such precautions, we will minimize the risk of COVID-19 and maximize prevention and safety. Speak up if you observe someone not following such precautions; we are all responsible for stopping the spread of the virus.

EH&S Guidelines: ENHANCED CLEANING FOR PREVENTION

General guidance:
1. Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting, focusing on high-touch surfaces, such as buttons, handrails, tables, faucets, doorknobs, shared equipment, and shared keyboards. Increased frequency of cleaning and disinfecting with attention to these areas helps remove bacteria and viruses, including the novel coronavirus.

2. Practice good hand hygiene after cleaning (and always!):
   - Wash hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds.
   - If soap and warm water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Safety guidelines during cleaning and disinfection:
1. Wear disposable gloves when cleaning and disinfecting. Gloves should be discarded after each use. Clean hands immediately after gloves are removed.
2. Wear eye protection when there is a potential for splash or splatter to the face.
3. Gowns or aprons are recommended to protect personal clothing.
4. Store chemicals in labeled, closed containers. Store them in a manner that prevents tipping or spilling.

Cleaning and disinfection of surfaces:
Visit the EH&S website to view guidance on Enhanced Cleaning Disinfection Protocols for Prevention.
1. Clean surfaces and objects that are visibly soiled first. If surfaces are dirty to sight or touch, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
2. Clean and disinfect affected surfaces as soon as possible after a known exposure to person with respiratory symptoms (such as coughing/sneezing).
3. Use an EPA-registered disinfectant for use against COVID-19. Refer to the list of products pre-approved for use against emerging enveloped viral pathogens, or the list of disinfectants for use against SARS-CoV-2.
4. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for safe and effective use of all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., dilution concentration, application method and contact time, required ventilation, and use of personal protective equipment). Review the COVID-19 Chemical Disinfectant Safety Information guide to potential health hazards and the recommended protective measures for common active disinfectant agents used at the UW.
5. Consult manufacturer recommendations on cleaning products appropriate for electronics. If no guidance is available, consider the use of alcohol-based wipes or spray containing at least 70% alcohol. Use of alcohol-based products may reduce the risk of damage to sensitive machine components. Whenever possible, consider using wipeable covers for electronics. Dry surfaces thoroughly to avoid pooling of liquids.
6. The following products are effective for disinfection of hard, non-porous surfaces:
   - A 10% diluted bleach solution, an alcohol solution with at least 70% alcohol, and/or an EPA-registered disinfectant for use against COVID-19.
   - Prepare a 10% diluted bleach solution by doing the following:
     - Mix five tablespoons of bleach per gallon of water.
     - After application, allow 2 minutes of contact time before wiping, or allow to air dry (without wiping).

If a COVID-19 case is confirmed in the UW community, University units are required to follow the guidance Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfection after Notification of a Confirmed Case of COVID-19 outlined in this document.
EH&S and public health guidance is updated as the situation evolves. For the most current guidance, please visit the UW's Novel coronavirus & COVID-19: facts and resources.