Social Distancing Practices in the Laboratory

Current Guidance and Recommendations
Introduction

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is the disease caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2.

- A zoonotic virus thought to have been spread from bats to humans.
- Currently the pandemic affecting the US is thought to be caused by a person to person spread.
- The respiratory droplets released by coughing, sneezing or talking by an infected person can travel and infect another person in close contact through inhalation, their eye, nose and mouth mucous membranes.
- Since there is not currently a vaccine or treatment to prevent COVID-19, interventions like social distancing and increased hand hygiene are practiced to mitigate the spread.
General Guidance on Return to Campus

• The following slides are intended to help BU researchers working on campus to adhere to practices which will help lessen potential exposure to COVID-19.

• Each building that your labs are located have assigned Building Coordinators. They will work with Facilities, EH&S, BUPD, and Public Safety to help set up guidelines and process for the safe operations in our buildings.

• Individuals must follow and adhere to these guidelines, procedures, and signs.

• Each building will have designated areas for receiving packages and shipment.

• The number of visitors and service providers will be limited.

• You must try to conserve the PPE in your lab. They should only be used during the appropriate tasks and when needed.
Measures to Maintain 6 Feet Distance

- Perform non-lab bench work remotely (i.e. computing)
  - Rely on Zoom/virtual meetings for all group discussions and lab meetings.
- Wear masks on campus. Cloth masks may be worn in the general public areas.
  - Wear appropriate PPE when in the laboratory and wear a dust/paper mask when working in a laboratory.
  - Workers who are required to wear a respirator such as an N95 must use them as part of their PPE.
  - Have appropriate accommodations for researchers with high-risk health conditions.
- Remove some lab chairs and stools to enable distancing.
- Assign designated lab bench work area.
Measures to Maintain 6 Feet Distance Continued

- Tape the floors to give visual reminders of proper spacing and direction of flow in the lab:
  - Around shared equipment (i.e. centrifuges, incubators, FACS machines, others).
  - In front of fume hoods.
  - In front of biosafety cabinets.
  - Around Satellite Accumulation Areas (SAA).
Time and Personnel Management

• Implement staggering scheduling to bring the lab work force to no more than 1/3 of the full capacity on any given day. Some examples are creating different shifts, different groupings scheduled for specific days (pods), etc.

• Do not work alone especially during late hours as something may happen and no one else is around to help you. Set up a “buddy system” with lab personnel as appropriate.

• Implement a strategy to manage staff times of arrival and departure to avoid overlap at pinch points like elevators, stairwells, and restrooms.

• Continue to postpone non-pressing research activities.

• Use a reservation system for common equipment to avoid physical interaction among lab staff.
• PI should oversee the scheduling of their research group(s) lab occupancy and schedules for wipe-down of all shared use surfaces
  • Shared labs should agree on a common practice for glove use on common surfaces
• Establish safe eating space away from labs with social distancing practices being maintained.
• Due to the possibility of scale-backs, ramp up projects that can be easily ramped back down
Minimizing Exposure

- Researchers should only work in their assigned area.
- In addition to standard laboratory PPE of lab coat, eye protection and gloves, researchers are required to wear masks such as surgical/medical masks while working in the laboratory.
- Personnel that are required to wear respirators such as an N95 must wear them when working in the lab.
- Ensure the laboratory has appropriate supplies of PPE for staff to carry out research and to protect themselves from other researchers.
- Ensure BSCs & fume hoods are certified, all eyewashes are working, and spill kits are available.
- Schedule experiments to reduce movement in and out of the laboratory.
Minimizing Exposure Continued

- Restrict access to lab to only essential personnel.
- Ensure laboratory plans are coordinated with the building plan established by the Building Coordinators.
- Follow guidance and signs implemented by Building Coordinators when using elevators, restrooms, other areas.
- Do not come to work if feeling unwell.
  - Leave work (if at work)/notify your supervisor.
  - Contact your primary care provider.
  - Contact the BU COVID-19 support line at 617-353-4990 to report illness. For non COVID-19 illnesses call ROHP or BUOHC.
  - Self-quarantine immediately for COVID-19 illness.
Laboratory Routine Hygiene Practices

• Establish a regular schedule for cleaning and wiping frequently touched surfaces and objects such as door and cabinet handles, faucets, light switches, keyboards, others with an approved disinfectant or disinfectant wipes.

• Keep cleaning logs that include date, time, and scope of cleaning.

• Follow routine surface decontamination of common equipment like instrumentation, fume hoods, biosafety cabinets and computer work-stations.

• Disinfect any surface that may be thought to be contaminated.

• Use an approved disinfectant like 10% Bleach or 70% alcohol. Please refer to the EPA list N disinfectants for more options.
  • https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2
Laboratory Routine Hygiene Practices: Handwashing

• Although already a best practice by all laboratory researchers and staff, in the midst of the pandemic it is imperative that hand washing, for at least 20 seconds, become more frequent and more thorough. Hand washing before the start of work in the lab, anytime when changing gloves, and before exiting the lab is crucial. Gloves are not 100% protective.

• Please view the CDC’s “Five Steps to Wash Your Hands the Right Way” https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html

• Also watch the CDC video on handwashing:
  • https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d914EnpU4Fo

• When soap and water are not available use hand sanitizer to disinfect hands.
Use of Facial Coverings

At Boston University, all individuals must wear face covering when in public and other areas. The only exceptions to this are if you are in your own private office to which you can close the door or are outside of the building and are able to maintain 6 feet social distance.

Please read BU Facial Covering and Respirator Guidelines @
Laboratory Routine Hygiene Practices: 
Masks

• Cloth Masks
  • Cloth face coverings are not considered PPE. The material is made of a multi-layered fabric and can be washed for re-use. It is intended to protect those around the user
  • CDC’s recommendation on cloth masks and face covering is available at: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html.
  • It needs to fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face and cover the nose, mouth, and chin.
  • It is secured by ties or ear loops.
  • It should allow breathing without restriction; it should be removed if breathing becomes difficult.
  • Can be laundered and machine dried without damage or change in shape.
  • It must be inspected before wearing and discarded if damaged or change in shape or deformity.
  • Do not touch your face after removing and wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water.
Laboratory Routine Hygiene Practices: Masks

- Surgical/medical masks are primarily used by health care providers and now, appropriate for use in the laboratory to help minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission. They protect the user from large droplets, splashes, or sprays of bodily fluids or other hazardous fluids. They also help stop the wearer from discharging large droplet aerosols from coughing, sneezing, and exhaling. They are disposable and intended for single use.

- Use of Surgical/Medical Masks in the Laboratory
  - Laboratory personnel should use a surgical/medical masks when in the lab along with the routine personal protective equipment that are normally worn and used.
  - The mask is disposable and intended for single use.
  - The mask must be replaced when contaminated, damaged, or dirty.
  - It must be removed and disposed before exiting the laboratory.
  - You must not touch your face after removing the mask and must wash your hands with soap and warm water and dry with clean paper towels.
Laboratory Routine Hygiene Practices:

Masks

- N95 Respirator
  - N95 masks are considered PPE respirators. They are used by health care, front-line workers, and lab personnel that have high risks for becoming exposed to concentration of infectious aerosols.
  - They are reusable and constructed of filters that may block very small airborne particulates.
  - Users must initially pass a medical clearance and undergo respiratory fit testing successfully before they can use them.
  - Authorized users must be trained appropriately on their use and care; putting on; and taking off.
  - You must not touch your face after removing the respirator and must wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water and dried with clean paper towels. An example of the appropriate way to don and doff an N95 safely may be seen at the following web site:
Guidance for Conducting Animal Research

• Coordinate with ASC regarding ramping up experiments to avoid unnecessary overlap in animal rooms.
• Communicate regarding illness of either ASC or lab staff.
• To reduce transport traffic designate the staff to remove and return animals.
• Coordinate the schedule for surgical rooms through ASC to prevent personal interaction.
Please contact EHS with any questions or needing assistance

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