Safe distancing guidelines for laboratories

In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, physical distancing measures can reduce the risk of transmission of the virus in research labs. If you are sick, do not come to campus. Seek medical attention immediately and then notify your supervisor to arrange for back up coverage. It is the responsibility of each Principal Investigator to adapt risk reduction strategies that best fit their specific research in order to minimize transmission of COVID-19 within their lab.

Every person is assumed to be a possible asymptomatic carrier of COVID-19 and physical distancing can be more challenging in laboratories. Cloth facial coverings or surgical type masks, consistent with CDC guidance, should be worn by all individuals when minimum safe distancing of 6 feet cannot be assured. The measures below are general guidance categorized into those that increase the physical space between researchers, and other measures to minimize contact time and cross-contamination if physical space measures are not feasible for operational reasons. These examples are non-exhaustive and we encourage you to share your best practices with ASU Environmental Health and Safety.

Increasing distance between researchers

- Avoid performing non-lab work activities such as computer or paper work in the lab if there are ongoing lab activities nearby. Encourage lab personnel to work remotely when possible.
- For labs with more than one entrance, consider designating one entrance for ingress and one entrance for egress to establish a traffic flow pattern and minimize proximity to others.
- If the researchers are working on back-to-back benches (back facing each other) in an open lab setting, their physical distance could be less than 6ft. In such cases, closing down alternate workspaces on each bench to create a staggered workspace across all the lab benches in a zigzag pattern should be done.
- Lab personnel should use alternate fume hoods if available, or wait in turn for use.
- Remove chairs or label chairs to prevent use so as to provide separation between researchers when they are at the workbench.
- Tape markers on the floor to identify 6ft separation when queuing up for the use of shared equipment, dispensing of chemicals in fume hood, or disposing of waste materials.
Decreasing contact time between researchers

- Implement a booking system with a specific downtime or blocked period for the use of common equipment to prevent physical encounter of the two persons such as 10 minute interval before the next person can use the equipment. This also applies for activities or equipment that are unable to be physically separated for operational reasons.
- Implement split team arrangements for laboratory usage, such as Team A and Team B to work on alternate days or half-day shifts.
- Implement time staggering for different teams to start and end work so as to minimize contact time and avoid peak hours for lab work.
- Postpone non-essential laboratory activities.
- Ramp down research activities. See other resources below for laboratories who plan to decrease their research activities.

Minimize cross-contamination

- Assign work areas such as desks or benches to an individual staff or student, and each researcher should only use their assigned work area.
- Based on 6ft of separation, determine and post the maximum occupancy allowed at core facilities.
- Change of work processes such as assigning specific tasks to the same person to restrict people movement across laboratories such as confocal microscopy, cell culture, etc.
- Do not come to campus if you are feeling unwell and seek medical attention.
- Ensure regular disinfection of areas where gloves are not used, such as door handles, sink handles or common equipment before and after use.
- Minimize contact with other staff outside of work as well, such as meals, transport and social gatherings.
- Restrict laboratory entry to only essential personnel.
- Wash hands before and after laboratory work is conducted. Hand sanitizers may be placed at strategic locations.

Other resources

- ASU COVID-19 building information signage.
- ASU COVID-19 safety training for on-site personnel with disclaimer.
- ASU disinfection guidelines for computer labs.
- ASU healthy habits while exercising.
- ASU lab ramp down:
  - ASU academic lab ramp down guidance and checklist.
  - ASU lab ramp down signage.
  - ASU research lab ramp down guidance and checklist.
- ASU reporting for COVID-19.
- ASU vehicle disinfection guidelines.
- Campus flu coughing poster.
- Campus flu season care don't share poster.
- Campus flu wash hands before meals poster.
- Campus flu wash hands in restrooms poster.
- COVID-19 elevator safety signage.
- Food safety guidance for COVID-19.
- Understanding social distancing.

Questions? Contact ASU Environmental Health and Safety at 480-965-1823.

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