

RETURN TO RESEARCH POLICY

Guiding Principles

The varied nature of research activity, laboratory layout, and group organization makes it difficult to develop specific rules and guidelines that will apply universally to our entire community. Hence, we developed the following principles that should guide the development of practices in the research laboratories and shared resources. While we have identified several practices that must be followed by everyone, we provide guidance for individual groups to implement additional practices to best meet their specific needs.

1. All community members are empowered and expected to play an active role in protecting their health and the health of others.
2. Principal investigators are in the best position to develop specific resumption plans for their research teams, ensuring that they are consistent with the guidance of the University.
3. The spread of COVID-19 cannot be completely prevented, but the diligent practice of social distancing, good hygiene and masks can minimize the risk.
4. The number of researchers on campus at any one time must be reduced to ensure social distancing. Hence, research and administrative support functions that can be done at home must continue to be done remotely.
5. Principal investigators and managers must not pressure or expect students, postdocs or staff members to come to work if they have concerns about being on campus, if they are ill, if they need to stay at home to care for ill or homebound dependents, if they have an underlying condition that places them at risk, or for other reasonable concerns.

Before Returning to Campus

All members of the University community should stay home whenever they are sick or have symptoms of respiratory illness. Before returning to campus you should:

- Ensure you do not have symptoms of the virus, including a fever (>100.1), chills, cough, shortness of breath, diarrhea, sore throat, or loss of sense of smell and/or taste.
- Have had no household contact in the last 14 days with someone diagnosed with COVID-19. When in doubt, stay home.
- Have not travelled by airplane in the prior 14 days. This guidance will change as the University's travel policy is updated.
- Work remotely when possible if you are considered high risk, [as defined by the CDC](#).

Required Training

The Office for Research has developed an online training module for researchers, "Pandemic Essentials: Research on Campus," that outlines practices for returning to campus. Later today, you will receive an email notification to complete this training. It is mandatory that you complete the training before returning to campus for research activity. The training module will be accessible through myHR Learn. You may contact [Dr. Michael Blayney](#) in Research Safety with any questions.

Your Laboratory Plan

Principal investigators (PIs) are responsible for providing direction and oversight of their projects, laboratories, and/or research sites, as well as graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and staff in their group. PIs are responsible for developing a specific plan for their research group for resuming research, and for discussing this plan with their group members. We are [providing a template](#) to assist you in developing the plan.

In this plan, each PI should:

- Identify all group members who will have access to the labs as well as those who are responsible for essential duties, including maintaining critical equipment, cell lines and animals.
- For each room in your laboratory, identify the maximum number of occupants that can be present in order to maintain social distancing of at least six feet. For example, in labs with multiple benches, identify those benches that can be (and cannot be) occupied while maintaining social distancing. Ensure that researchers do not work face-to-face directly across from one another. You may wish to reposition shared equipment and common workstations. The Office for Research Safety [will provide signs](#) that should be marked for the number of occupants for each room, which should be posted on each door.
- Organize access of your laboratory by your group, including the use of shifts, to maintain social distancing while allowing efficient progress of your research. In most cases, about one-third of a lab may be present. Even in cases where social distancing can accommodate a larger fraction of your group, no more than one-half of your lab may be present at any time. Requests for exceptions -- for example, for groups having a small number of members -- may be made to your associate dean for research. Apart from time-sensitive experiments, do not establish regular work shifts that occur between the hours of 11 p.m. and 7 a.m.
- Each lab should develop a schedule for cleaning of common areas, including desks and tabletops, doorknobs and handles, light switches, phones, keyboards and touchscreens, as well as common surfaces on shared equipment. This cleaning will be performed by lab members and not custodial staff. The University will schedule custodial staff to fully clean laboratory areas once weekly and perform a disinfection cleaning of high touch areas four times per week.
- Identify those areas of your lab that will not be used, which might include the kitchen, social interaction spaces and others.
- Implement a shared, online document where your group members can record the times they are present in your laboratory.

Each PI must host a mandatory online meeting with their team to discuss the plan, and members must acknowledge they understand the plan (by email to the PI) before they resume on-campus research. Once research begins on campus, PIs are responsible for monitoring and enforcing the plan.

Evanston-based PIs must submit their plan to their department chair for approval and once approved, upload the plan through the LUMEN site. Chicago-based PIs must upload the plan through the LUMEN site, where they will be subject to review.

Additionally, the Office for Research Safety will provide each laboratory with a pandemic supply kit, which includes masks, hand sanitizer, disinfectant and signage to be posted in your groups. After you have submitted your laboratory plan to Lumen, contact your laboratory safety specialist to coordinate delivery of your kit.

Social Distancing in Laboratories, Offices and Common Areas

Social distancing is the most effective strategy to minimize the spread of COVID-19. The following points describe the mandatory steps for researchers as well as suggestions for you to consider in developing the plan for each lab.

- Maintain at least six feet of separation from your co-workers, when possible.
- Consider removing chairs from some rooms to enable social distancing.
- Consider planning traffic flow in and out of your spaces to minimize contact between personnel. For example, one door is for entry and another for exiting.
- Hold meetings by teleconference or video platforms -- even when people are physically on campus or near the lab together.
- Minimize sharing items by providing each person with personal office and lab supplies.
- Small restrooms and elevators in Evanston buildings will be single occupancy. If you enter an elevator or small restroom and it is occupied, wait outside until the space becomes empty. Larger restrooms can accommodate multiple people, but social distancing and use of face protection is mandatory. Elevators in the larger Chicago buildings can accommodate four occupants, each positioned in a corner. Use of stairs is strongly encouraged for those physically able.

For additional guidance on social distancing, see the [COVID-19: Return to Campus Guidelines](#).

Personal and Lab Hygiene

Washing your hands and cleaning your personal and laboratory areas are critical to minimizing the spread of the virus, and can be accomplished in the following ways:

- Wash hands frequently throughout the day, and always when entering and leaving your research space. Wash thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, then rinse and dry.
- When soap and water are unavailable, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol and rub hands together for at least 20 seconds. The sanitizer will be

provided in the pandemic supply kit and will be available in the scientific stock rooms.

- Cough/sneeze into sleeves, preferably into your elbow. When using a tissue, discard it properly and clean/sanitize hands.
- Avoid touching your face, particularly your eyes, nose and mouth to prevent infection.
- Avoid using lab phones and instead use your mobile phone during work.
- Clean and disinfect workspaces frequently, not less than twice a day. The pandemic supply kit will have an initial supply of disinfectant. Additional supply will be available in the scientific stock rooms.
- The custodial staff will perform a full cleaning of each lab once weekly and a disinfection cleaning of high touch areas four times each week. Be considerate of the cleaning staff and leave areas in which they are working (unless doing so poses a safety risk with active experiments).

Use and Provision of PPE

- Face coverings must be worn in public areas including lobbies, restrooms, hallways, stairwells, elevators and vending areas. They must be used in laboratories where social distancing is not possible. Masks will be provided by Research Safety, initially in the pandemic supply kit, and restocked as needed. Because masks can also concentrate dangerous volatiles or particles in laboratories, they are not required in all research spaces at all times. Please consult Research Safety if you have questions about when it is safe to wear a mask in your research laboratory.
- Disposable gloves will be available from the scientific stockrooms. Researchers should continue to wear gloves when handling known hazardous substances. Remember that frequent handwashing is more effective than the use of gloves in minimizing transmission of COVID-19. The CDC does not recommend persistent use of gloves.
- Lab coats, gowns, or aprons are recommended to protect personal clothing. Remove lab coats and gloves when leaving the laboratory. Coats may be exchanged for cleaning at any time.
- 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.

How to Respond to a Potential COVID-19 Exposure

The University has established processes to be followed for individuals who believe they may have the virus, for individuals that have tested positive and for individuals who have been in contact with people that have tested positive.

- All staff and faculty are required to report a positive test or voluntary [self-isolation](#) due to suspected exposure or symptoms using the University's online reporting [portal](#). Individuals are required to cooperate fully with the University's self-

isolation, contact tracing and notification protocols, in alignment with CDC and IDPH requirements

- Testing is available at facilities near our campuses and across the state of Illinois. IDPH has issued guidance for qualifying for testing and compiled a list of locations offering testing:
 - Guidance: <http://dph.illinois.gov/covid19/testing-guidance>
 - Testing site locations: <http://dph.illinois.gov/testing>
- Your primary care physician is the best resource for questions about your health and appropriate testing; please consult your doctor if you have symptoms or suspect exposure.
- For medical emergencies, call 911 and notify the dispatch personnel that you may have COVID-19.
- The following testing site locations have been identified for your convenience:
 - In Chicago, Northwestern Memorial Healthcare will test any FSM faculty, student, or staff member who exhibits symptoms or is otherwise determined to need testing. Check the Feinberg COVID-19 page for further details.
 - In Evanston, the following testing site locations are near campus:
 - NorthShore University Health System - *multiple locations including 2650 Ridge Ave., and 1729 Benson Ave. Evanston.*
 - Testing is available by appointment with a doctor's order.
[Web](#) | Phone: 847-432-5849
 - Erie Evanston Skokie Health Center - *1285 Hartrey Ave., Evanston.*
 - *Testing is available to existing patients, by appointment only.*
[Web](#) | Phone: 312-666-3494
 - AMITA Health St. Francis Hospital Outpatient Testing Site - *355 Ridge Ave., Evanston.*
 - *Drive-through testing is available with a doctor's order.*
 - [Web](#) | Phone: 855.692.6482
 - Howard Brown Health – *multiple locations, including 6500 N. Clark St., Chicago.*
 - *No appointment needed.*
 - [Web](#) | Phone: 773-388-1600
 - AHS Family Health Center – *8800 Lockwood Ave., Skokie.*
Drive-through testing is available with a doctor's order, by appointment only.

[Web](#) | Phone: 1-800-597-5077

- Physicians Immediate Care Clinics – *multiple locations, including 6140 North Broadway, Chicago.*
Curbside evaluation and testing are available.
[Web](#) | Phone: *Varies by location*
- IDPH Harwood Heights Drive-through - *6959 West Forest Preserve Drive, Chicago.*
Drive-thru testing site, no appointment is required but capacity is limited. This is a state of Illinois testing site.
Phone: 1-800-889-3931
- Note that requirements vary by testing site, and you may be required to obtain a test order from your primary care physician. Some locations may charge for testing and/or a physician's evaluation of your symptoms. Please refer to the information provided by each site prior to visiting.
- When individuals that receive a positive test result report through the portal, Risk Management will initiate contact tracing and direct individuals to self-isolate. Research Safety will then perform a sterilization of the area.

How to Report Concerns

We expect individual groups to abide by the requirements and suggestions described here, but we realize that in a community as large as ours, there may be concerns about non-compliance.

Graduate students and postdoctoral trainees should report their concerns to The Graduate School by writing to covid19compliance@northwestern.edu. Trainees may also contact their chairs or others to discuss their concerns.

A university-wide hotline is available for faculty, staff and students: 847-467-8840. Feinberg-specific concerns should be reported to: 312-503-3437.

Via EthicsPoint: [Online report](#); 866-294-3545