

Lab Operation Ramp-Up Guidelines – COVID-19

LAB OPERATION RAMP-UP

Lab Operational Readiness

Many labs suspended or greatly reduced lab activities beginning in March. A lab that hasn't been fully operational for some time will require some cleaning, maintenance and restocking before work can begin.

- Check all lab and safety equipment (including associated utilities) and storage units to verify that they are functioning properly.
- Verify the condition of all reagents and hazardous waste receptacles. Correct or [make arrangements](#) for disposal if needed.
- Use this time to “spring clean”- declutter and reorganize. Routine cleaning and disinfection is now required as part of the lab's operation -- the more exposed surfaces you have, the more cleaning you will need to do.
 - Assess all items in the lab and if it doesn't have a purpose, make arrangements to have it disposed of or transferred to surplus.
 - If you have lab equipment to be sent to surplus, please ensure that you follow the [lab equipment release procedure](#) when preparing your equipment for pickup.
 - Eliminate open storage or storage of items in cardboard whenever possible.
- Ensure that the lab is stocked with the supplies necessary to safely and effectively carry out lab activities before resuming operations.
 - Reuse of disposable PPE (especially gloves) is not an acceptable or safe method for extending supplies. Ensure that you stock enough devices in the range of sizes needed for your lab personnel to support the proper use of disposable PPE.
 - Plan to acquire enough disinfectant and paper towels to support the disinfection practices previously stated.
 - Plan to provide disposable face coverings if personnel working at the bench will not be able to carry out work in accordance with physical distancing guidelines.
- Ensure that your lab has developed a rapid shutdown contingency plan in the event it becomes necessary to suspend or reduce operations again. The plan should identify key personnel and contact numbers address any items specified by [VUMC](#) policy.

Get “Refreshed”: Lab Safety Practices and Policies

As you are planning to ramp up lab activities, research personnel should refresh on both technical and lab safety procedures to ensure a safe and productive transition back to work. Here are some examples of resources to help you with this.

- [Lab Safety Training Guide](#) – OCRS offers many online trainings covering lab safety-related topics. This table summarizes these offerings and provides direction for accessing training through the VUMC learning management system. The most recently updated biosafety offering is the [Biosafety 101: Standard Microbiological Practices](#) course which covers topics relevant to reopening labs under current conditions such as disinfection, waste management and lab hygiene considerations. (This course includes the same content as the 2019 Biosafety Refresher so those who missed that will be credited with 2019 refresher completion if completed before the end of May.)

- [OCRS Biohazardous Waste Page](#) – Collecting and preparing this waste for pickup in a manner that doesn't spread contamination is challenging under any circumstance. Now more than ever, it's important that these wastes be managed in a way that truly ensures safety for all involved in the handling process. For labs located in University-owned buildings, the container safety checklists linked toward the bottom of the page are a great refresher tool.
- [Managing Research Lab Hazards](#) – If your lab's research will be taking a new direction that will involve the use of radiological, biological or chemical hazards that haven't been used by your team in the past, this document outlines the requirements for getting approvals and implementing safety practices. If you are planning to pursue research with specimens derived from COVID+ subjects or any materials that may have a SARS-CoV-2 risk, visit the [Emerging Infectious Agents in Research](#) page for more information on determining what approvals and containment conditions are needed for this work.

Personal Protective Equipment v. Face Coverings: Considerations for Lab Work

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is a device that you wear in order to protect you from an injury or an exposure to a known hazard. In most lab situations, PPE including a body covering, gloves and eye protection are appropriate, but respirators are generally not required. When a respirator (like an N-95) is required (based on a determination by OCRS or Occupational Health), the person must complete specific training and a medical clearance and be fit-tested for the specific device being worn. Now that N-95s are in short supply, it's even more important that these respirators only be used by those who are required and approved to wear them.

As of 8/17/2020, both VU and VUMC require that non-medical disposable or cloth facemasks must be worn in the lab. (Check the [VU](#) and [VUMC](#) Coronavirus web sites for the latest masking requirements.) Unlike PPE designed for lab work (lab coats, gloves, eye and face protection), cloth face coverings will generally not be left in the lab after use, and the likelihood of touching the face covering with contaminated gloves is great. **To avoid contamination of cloth masks when working with hazardous materials** (biological, chemical and/or radiological), **wear disposable masks or wear a full-length face shield over a cloth mask.** If you are having difficulty acquiring disposable masks, please contact your Departmental Administrator or OCRS for assistance.

OCRS Contacts for More Information or Assistance

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