Standard Operating Procedure for Restarting OUHSC Research Activities

Introduction

Research/Laboratory employees are an important asset and must be granted a safe workspace. Until directed otherwise, physical distancing will still be a valuable tool to reduce spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory diseases. Principal Investigators should consider how they can guarantee the safety and health of their work force, such as:

- Form staffing teams and rotations.
- Limit staffing numbers to help with physical distancing (maintain a minimal distance of six feet from other laboratory employees at all times). Specific information regarding distancing can be found in the Plan for Phase One Reopening of Bench Laboratory Research.
- Slow start approach: Assign minimal staff to make media, set up cultures, etc. before beginning full research.
- Surgical-style face masks are required when working in an OUHSC facility/laboratory.
- Implement stronger, more frequent disinfecting protocols for laboratory and office spaces.

Supplies & Equipment.

During laboratory closure, it is not uncommon for supplies to be expired or used elsewhere, or for equipment to require recalibration or certification when restarted. Also, remember as many labs and offices return to work, there may be a strain on purchasing. Each laboratory should generate a master list before commencing, such as:

- Consider what equipment needs recalibrated/certified.
- Determine what reagents/media need remade or reordered.
- Document what PPE is required and ensure it is still available. OUHSC will be providing masks as outlined in the Plan for Phase One Reopening of Bench Laboratory Research, and will be coordinated by Departments/Colleges.

Experimentation.

Careful attention should be given to the types and duration of research following reconstitution. Backlogs in purchasing and media prep, animal husbandry, reduced staff size, and potential subsequent step-downs must be considered. Researchers should document their research plan and flexibilities in this uncertain climate, such as:

- What are your first planned experiments?
- What is the necessary duration of the research?
- Will animals be required?
- Can a staggered start be implemented while media is made, cell lines are started, etc.?
- Will the research be easily halted if another step-down is necessary?
- Can the research be performed with limited staff and/or rotating teams?
**Individual Potential Exposure Assessment**

In reopening research at OUHSC, the top priority must be public health: not just the health of OUHSC employees, but also the health of Oklahomans. Premature repopulation of our buildings and research sites must be done in a manner that minimizes risk of a rebound in SAR-CoV-2 infection rates that threatens our state.

A return to normal activity generally is unlikely for many months. We must understand that the practice of laboratory research specifically will not be the same as it was in 2019, and OUHSC must develop ways to reduce physical interactions in the labs until this pandemic has receded. New waves of infection may occur in the coming months, and we must be prepared for the possibility of returning to lower levels of lab activity.

This plan is based upon keeping as low a population density in research laboratories and buildings as possible, while still allowing research to continue. Telecommuting should occur to the maximum extent amount possible to reduce population density in research laboratories and buildings.

All researchers must read and be familiar with the OUHSC COVID-19 Return Plan.

All employees, including Faculty Researchers, who are or have been absent from campus for more than seven consecutive calendar days must complete the COVID-19 self-screening questionnaire: https://covidreporting.ouhsc.edu/ and submit it before returning to campus. If any of the answers to questions in the Symptom Information, Travel History, or Exposure Information sections are Yes, the employee will need to wait to be cleared before returning to campus. Employees will be notified via email of their screening results. This return to work email must be forwarded to the employee’s direct supervisor upon receipt.

**Work Space Risk Assessment**

Consider the environment you will be working in.

- Will you potentially be in a confined space where social distancing cannot be adhered to?
- Are the necessary PPE items e.g ample gloves (if necessary), paper towels, 70% alcohol or disinfectant available in your workspace?
- Have all measures been taken to insure work areas, equipment, and/or scheduling allow for occupants to work >6ft apart?
- Have you obtained approval to use shared core facilities/instruments?

If the answer is ‘NO’ or ‘I Don’t Know’ to any of the above then discuss with your supervisor before coming to the laboratory.

**Once approved for work in the laboratory:**

A guiding principle for developing a Standard Operating Procedure for research activities during the Covid-19 pandemic is that **we should care for each other and our community.** Therefore, it is important that we adopt protocols that allow us to adhere to social distancing and avoid potential spread of the disease in our workplace. Notwithstanding careful self-assessments and SOP measures, we must
presume that ANYONE operating in our space/building/lab could be an apparently healthy but asymptomatic carrier of this highly contagious virus. We expect everyone to adopt these principles and adhere to the SOP below, because we wish to maintain research as far as practicable.

Having ascertained you are approved for laboratory work, are healthy, and your workspace has cleared the risk assessment above, the following guidelines should be followed.

**General Work Guidelines for Working During COVID-19 Pandemic**

- Enter building/laboratory using disability access auto-open doors (using elbow contact), if feasible.
- Wash hands thoroughly as per best practices (20 sec, hot water and soap, paper towel dry) on entering the building/lab.
- Frequently sanitize surfaces, countertops and equipment being used with >70% alcohol, mild bleach or other recommended product appropriate for the equipment etc. (Check manufacturer recommendations, as needed).
- Spray/wipe all door handles before use.
- Decontaminate items before and after use, there is no such thing as too clean.
- Strict social distancing rules will apply (occupants will remain >6ft apart at all times) and workstations will be assigned or arranged at least 6ft apart.
- No conversations or chatting in close proximity.
- Be especially mindful of shared rooms e.g. tissue culture, bathroom etc., freezer room etc. where others might be coming and going (and may not be adhering to the SOP).
- Avoid entering small shared rooms when others are using (e.g. wait for someone to get samples from a -80 and leaves the room before you enter).
- Do not bring food to the labs or eat in the labs/offices.
- Do not use water fountains and use personal water bottle.
- Minimize time in the lab; plan for efficient use of time and leave as soon as you are finished. Do your data entry, analysis and other dry tasks at home.
- If use of core facilities/instruments is required, your work must be coordinated with the person responsible prior to start of work/analysis. Disinfect everything/anything after using it.
- Use a shared calendar, group electronic communication etc. to schedule time in shared lab environments to limit occupancy in the space and to insure adherence to effective social distancing
- A daily log of laboratory activity should be recorded (e.g. log name; date; work area/room number(s); time in; time out).
- Prior to leaving the laboratory, remove gloves and wash/sanitize hands prior to leaving the laboratory. Wash your hands and take all advised precautions on arriving home.
- OUHSC Principal Investigators will check activities in their areas of responsibility.
- All OUHSC lab users have an obligation to immediately (on the spot) correct deviations from this SOP by their peers, and report to their Principal Investigator as soon as possible. It is important that we help each other adopt best practices as quickly as possible. We are all human, and make mistakes, but we cannot allow non-compliance.
- Any person not adhering to this SOP could be disciplined in accordance with University policy and research-related privileges reduced or removed.
# Reconstitution Checklist

## Personnel & Safety

- Determine how physical distancing standards will be applied and the number of researchers that will be allowed at any given time.
- Consider staffing teams and rotations.
- Disposable or fabric surgical-style facemask masks will be provided by OUHSC and must be worn in research laboratories and in accordance with OUHSC COVID-19 Return Plan.
- Assign minimal staff to make media, set up cultures, etc. before beginning full research.
- What disinfection protocols are needed? (disinfectant used, frequency, etc.)

## Supplies & Equipment

- Consider what equipment needs recalibrated/certified
  - *Place requests for service from outside contractors/vendors with your lab chief/director prior to scheduling service or having anyone arrive on campus.*
- Determine what reagents/media need remade or reordered.
- What consumables need ordered/re-stocked.
- Document what PPE is required and if it is still available from OUHSC.
- Start-up/test computer-controlled scientific equipment prior to initiating runs.

## Experimentation

- Decide first planned experiments.
- What is the necessary duration of the research?
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<th>Question</th>
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<td>Will animals be required?</td>
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