

Guidance for Minimizing the Potential for Transmission of COVID-19 in Research Laboratories

Due to their varying sizes, layouts, and operations, research laboratories present a unique set of challenges for maintaining physical distancing (at least 6-feet apart) to minimize the spread of COVID-19. The intent of this guidance is to assist labs and departments in designing and implementing plans as Clemson begins to gradually restart research operations across campus(es). Please consult [Occupational and Environmental Safety \(OES\)](#) with any questions or for assistance.

The primary method for reducing the potential for transmission of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases in laboratories is to minimize the number of people in proximity at any one time. This, in combination with proper social distancing, personal hygiene, and lab sanitization, can reduce the potential for transmission.

- Schedules should be developed and implemented by individual labs to minimize the number of researchers in proximity at any one time (i.e. alternate days, morning / afternoon shifts, etc.). Schedules should be shared with and coordinated by department leadership and building managers to minimize the number of personnel per building floor and in the building itself. In situations where different departments' labs occupy a given building, coordination is required between department leadership and building managers.
 - Any personnel who are ill (or have an ill household member) should not report to work. Supervisors should be notified immediately.
 - A general rule of thumb is to allow for ~150 square feet of lab space per individual. To determine the area of lab spaces, refer to the University Facilities space management page (https://cufacilities.sites.clemson.edu/space/assign_room.php). For buildings not on main campus, or not listed in the database, the area can be estimated using the Facilities floor plan database (<https://cufacilities.sites.clemson.edu/floorPlans/planList>) or estimated from the space itself. This information should be used as a guide for PIs to determine the appropriate number of researchers in a space at a given time. Note: actual numbers in a space may be higher or lower depending on the layout of a particular space (i.e. equipment, benches, hoods, etc.).
 - Lab schedules can utilize weekends and evening hours to help accommodate scheduling. If such times are used, develop plans to ensure personnel safety while working after hours in the lab.
 - Account for the potential of close contact by researchers in common areas such as hallways, bathrooms, etc. Access to non-essential common areas should be minimized (i.e. lounges, dining areas, etc.).
 - Researchers should come to work at the predetermined time and have experimental plans ready to take full advantage of their allotted time.
 - If possible, all necessary materials should be assembled at the workstation at the beginning of the shift to minimize the need to access numerous areas of the lab.
 - Literature research, data analysis, manuscript preparation, etc. should be conducted remotely.

- Lab meetings, discussions, etc. should be conducted remotely via online resources. These meetings should be used as a platform to adjust schedules and lab protocols as needed.
- If the lab has been in a dormant state, refer to the [Guidance for Laboratory Startup](#).
- Lab sanitization schedules should be designed and implemented by each lab (see [Guidance for Sanitization of Research Laboratories](#)). Department leadership and / or building managers should coordinate the scheduled sanitization of common areas and shared research spaces.

Other considerations when designing lab and department-level plans include:

- Laboratories that contain shared equipment (i.e. NMR, X-ray diffractometers, microscopes, etc.) should maintain an online calendar to limit the number of personnel in the facility.
- Schedules for sanitization of shared facilities should be designed and implemented.
- Signage or floor markings using tape may be useful in common areas to provide visual indications for proper distancing. Physical barriers should be used where appropriate. Contact OEC for [lab signage templates](#).
- Follow all current university guidance on the use of face coverings.
- All personnel should continue to practice proper hygiene (handwashing, covering coughs and sneezes, etc.) and supplies of soap, hand sanitizer, sanitizing wipes, etc. should be provided and maintained.

OES and the Division of Research will work in concert with labs and departments to help in formulating and implementing these plans. It should be noted that there is no “one size fits all” approach to this and that plans may have to be modified.

It is important to remember that minimizing the potential for the transmission of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases requires the involvement and active participation of all university personnel.