

May 8, 2020

Plan to Resume Limited (25%) Wet Research Laboratory Operations on May 18

The following is our plan to begin the process of gradually easing the current restrictions on wet research laboratories within the several research buildings at Mount Sinai (Atran plus upper floors of Annenberg, Hess, and Icahn). The plan has been vetted and approved by School and Health System leadership as well as the relevant offices including Housekeeping, CCMS, Infection Prevention, Environmental Health & Safety, and the Clinical Laboratories). Of note, the large majority of laboratory floors use a separate bank of elevators which help separate research from clinical and educational functions. Computational researchers, and administrative/financial staff that support laboratories, should continue to work from home except when it is necessary to come to campus in which case the below provisions apply.

The current restrictions allow each laboratory to have a skeleton crew of 2-3 individuals (up to 4 for larger laboratories) to maintain critical animal and cell lines. In addition, laboratories doing Covid-19 research are functioning at normal, higher levels. In all cases, people are expected to maintain social distancing.

Effective May 18, research staff are expected to adhere to the following:

1. Laboratories will be permitted to increase their lab census to one-quarter (25%) of the normal density at any point in time. Each laboratory bay can have only one person (instead of the normal 2-4) at work at any given time (exceptions must be approved by Dr. Nestler – see below contact information). Each laboratory PI will decide how to achieve this metric: e.g., by having people work on campus on different days or during different shifts per day.
2. Returning to the lab is voluntary for all trainees and staff. No one should feel coerced or pressured to return during this initial phase, and should report any such coercion or pressure through the new Feedback Form, HR, department/institute/division chairs/directors, or Dr. Nestler.
3. All laboratory personnel must wear face masks at all times in the laboratory and within the medical center hallways. A plan has been developed to provide all lab personnel with a new face mask each day. Frequent hand washing and glove etiquette within labs will be maintained.
4. Each laboratory will be responsible for cleaning work spaces at least 2 times per day (start/end each day or start/end of different shifts). Normal housekeeping schedules (garbage removal, floor cleaning) will resume.
5. Crowding of elevators and elevator lobbies will be avoided. All individuals entering elevators must wear a mask or face covering. Elevators will also be cleaned more frequently. Gloves should not be worn in elevators unless being used to transport biohazardous materials (which must be in freight elevators only).
6. Occupancy of all procedure rooms, cold rooms, tissue culture rooms, etc., which normally might have several people in them at any given point in time, will be limited to ensure ≥ 6 feet in social distancing at all times. Online scheduling, organized at the lab or department/institute level, will be used to manage this occupancy.
7. The same is true for lunch and break space. Social distancing must be maintained with assigned shifts if need be. Conference rooms on each lab floor will be available for lunch and breaks, and staff will be responsible for cleaning surfaces after use.

8. All staff should monitor themselves for symptoms of SARS-CoV2 infection (e.g., fevers, sore throat, cough, shortness of breath). Anyone with symptoms should immediately remove themselves from the laboratory and notify their PI. Those who develop symptoms at home should notify their PI. Staff will be referred to either Employee Health Service or Student Health for further guidance and recommendations for return to work.
9. Each PI will be responsible for maintaining these precautions. Designated safety officers in each department/institute, along with Environmental Health & Safety, will do regular rounds and will be available for consultations. Any laboratory that is noncompliant will be closed immediately for a period of at least one month during which time an assessment will take place to determine whether the laboratory should reopen.
10. There will be no in-person group meetings of any size. This includes no WIPs, seminars, thesis committee meetings, etc. All meetings will continue to operate through Zoom only.

We will evaluate how well this plan is working as well as monitor closely rates of COVID-19 infection among lab personnel before considering further easing restrictions on wet lab research work. We are heartened by considerable data showing no increased risk for infection (in fact, the data show reduced risk) among healthcare workers and laboratory personnel over the past two months. We will also continue to be guided by the Governor's guidelines for New York State, which importantly have consistently designated all medical research as essential.

Questions about this plan should be directed to Dr. Eric Nestler (eric.nestler@mssm.edu), Dean for Academic and Scientific Affairs.