Laboratories - Guidance on Working in the Laboratory & Physical Distancing

To support researchers continuing or returning to work in the laboratory during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Reminder for all personnel:

- If you feel sick, stay home, DO NOT come to work and inform your supervisor.
- If you become sick while at work, STOP working, isolate yourself from others, inform your Supervisor and go home as soon as possible, avoiding public transportation and taking measures to protect others around you.
- If you had a close contact with a person suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 in the past 14 days, DO NOT come to work and inform your supervisor.

If you are worried that you were exposed to COVID-19 or have symptoms, take the Public Health Ontario COVID-19 self-assessment [1] for guidance on next steps OR visit an assessment centre near you [2] to get tested. For a complete list of COVID-19 related symptoms, refer to the Ministry of Health’s COVID-19 Reference Document for Symptoms [3].

Currently, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and Public Health Ontario advise the following:

- Strict hygiene measures, including avoiding touching your face, frequent hand washing and physical (social) distancing (2m separation between yourself and other people) will reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus; and,
- Using a non-medical face masks is a tool that may reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 in workplaces where physical distancing (2-metre distance between individuals) is challenging or not possible.

The following guidance will help us maintain our health and safety as we return to laboratory operations:

1. Minimize the number of research team members (faculty, staff, students, etc.) who access the laboratory at any time to ensure all individuals can continue to practice physical distancing. Consider:
   - Staggering schedules of lab personnel, noting that working alone situations must be managed appropriately. Stagger break and lunch periods as well.
   - Creating “teams” of lab personnel that will work at the same time so as to minimize the number of different contacts an individual may have. This is meant to reduce the number of people that would be impacted in the event of a positive case of COVID-19 within the research group.
   - Adding visual markings to the space (e.g. floor) to indicate appropriate physical distancing.
   - Relocating equipment and reconfiguring workstations to support physical distancing.
   - Establishing uni-directional workflow (i.e. one-way paths for movement within the lab)
2. If physical distancing cannot be maintained or predicted, wear a non-medical mask and minimize the time spent within 2m. Review and follow the Public Health’s instruction video on “How to wear a non-medical mask or face covering properly [4]”.
3. Implement appropriate disinfection of equipment, and common surfaces. For example, using an appropriate disinfectant, wipe down the following at the beginning of use and before the end of use on a given day, or before its use by another individual:
   - Equipment surfaces
   - Bench tops
   - Faucets
   - Fume hood sash, and workspace
   - Door handles
4. Implement appropriate hand hygiene practices, including regular handwashing for at least 20 seconds with soap and water or use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. At a minimum, hands should be washed upon...
entering the lab, upon doffing gloves, and before leaving the lab.
5. Ensure that fume hood verification and biosafety cabinet certifications are current, as applicable¹.
6. Ensure that you have an adequate supply of PPE to support your laboratory activities.
7. Be prepared for disruptions or delays in the supply chain due to limited availability of supplies, and/or slower than normal processing or delivery times.
8. Ensure that training is current. Registration for EHS online training courses can be done via the EHS registration system [5].

¹Note that annual fume hood and biosafety cabinet certifications due for the spring are currently being scheduled.

Approved disinfectants for hard surfaces can be found on the Health Canada website [6] e.g. Virkon.

Please contact the Laboratory Safety Officer at lab.safety@uoguelph.ca [7] with any questions.

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Links
[5] https://ehs.opened.uoguelph.ca/index.cfm?
[7] mailto:lab.safety@uoguelph.ca