

## **Safety Guidelines for Essential Research Personnel**

The University of Pittsburgh Department of Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) has developed a checklist for temporary suspension of laboratory activities (<https://www.ehs.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/docs/LabShutdownChecklist.pdf>). The following guidelines have been developed for research and laboratory activities that are deemed essential under current guidance issued by the University of Pittsburgh.

Essential personnel and essential research activity must not circumvent existing safety practices. Changes to safety practices, including required PPE and the use of EPA-registered disinfectants, must be approved by EH&S, particularly during this unprecedented pandemic situation. EH&S remains available via e-mail and phone ([safety@ehs.pitt.edu](mailto:safety@ehs.pitt.edu); [biosafe@ehs.pitt.edu](mailto:biosafe@ehs.pitt.edu); 412-624-9505) to provide assistance.

Essential research personnel should observe the following best practices:

### **COVID-19 Safety and Wellness:**

- Evaluate stocks of commodities, especially Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and plan for ongoing disruptions in supply. Certain PPE may be increasingly difficult to obtain. Please be aware that the CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear face masks to protect themselves against respiratory diseases, including COVID-19. Some additional important reminders regarding PPE:
  - Do not alter the required PPE for any essential laboratory activities without EH&S approval.
  - Do not modify the type and model of PPE determined by your original risk assessment or EH&S guidance without consulting with EH&S.
  - EH&S has access to a limited supply of certain PPE. Please check with EH&S if your supply dwindles or a shortage is anticipated.
- Notify your supervisor immediately if you feel sick. All personnel, including those supporting essential research, must stay home when sick. Alternative personnel will cover essential activities.
- Ensure that personnel conducting essential research are maintaining a minimum of six feet between themselves and co-workers. One way to accomplish effective social distancing is by alternating work schedules to minimize the number of personnel present in a workspace.
- Ensure that good hygiene practices (e.g. hand washing, cough etiquette) are observed (<https://www.emergency.pitt.edu/covid-19/prevention-symptoms>).

- Disinfect commonly touched laboratory surfaces and work spaces with an EPA-approved disinfectant daily. Pay special attention to disinfection of:
  - Doorknobs, light switches
  - Equipment handles or latches
  - Equipment controls and touch pads
  - Micro-pipettors and other shared items
  - Handles on faucets, drawers, cabinets, equipment lids
  - Computer keyboards, phones, pens
- **Any personnel who begin to feel ill while in a research laboratory should follow EH&S guidance for responding to symptomatic individuals**  
(<https://www.emergency.pitt.edu/covid-19/personal-risk-symptomatic-individuals>)

### **Laboratory Safety Best Practices:**

- High risk procedures should not be conducted while working alone. See existing guidance below. If working alone, restrict use of hazardous chemicals, compressed gases, work with lasers, high voltage equipment, and pressurized equipment.  
(<https://www.ehs.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/docs/03-020WorkingAloneinLabs.pdf>)
- Ensure that individuals conducting laboratory tasks/and operations have completed the appropriate training and reviewed the appropriate EH&S guidelines. If new staff are introduced to the research environment due to absenteeism, assure that lab-specific training is conducted with new individuals prior to initiating work.
- Ensure that individuals handling cryogenics follow appropriate safety procedures and have appropriate training (<https://www.ehs.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/docs/03-006Cryogenics.pdf>).
- Notify colleagues/supervisor of your intentions to work in the lab. Establish a communications protocol for use when essential personnel are working on campus. See recommendations for a “virtual buddy” in the Communications section of the EH&S checklist (<https://www.ehs.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/docs/LabShutdownChecklist.pdf>).
- Employee Health Services in the MyHealth@Work clinic remains available in case of injury or exposure in the laboratory or animal facility (<https://www.ehs.pitt.edu/injuries-pittsburgh-campus>). If you become ill with symptoms related to COVID-19 while at work, go home immediately and call Employee Health Services at 412-647-4949 upon arrival at home. Do not go to the clinic or any health care provider prior to calling. See the University Emergency page for additional information ((<https://www.emergency.pitt.edu/covid-19/personal-risk-symptomatic-individuals>)).