

Syracuse University

Environmental Health and Safety Services

Return to Research Guidance

This document contains information and recommended practices to assist researchers in restarting laboratory operations once approved to return to campus. In addition to these practices, Syracuse University's general policies, protocols and recommendations for faculty and staff returning to campus must also be followed.

***Updated August 17, 2020 with revised guidance on physical distancing and updated University policy on face masks or face coverings.

Required Lab Attire

Syracuse University requires face masks or face coverings for all students, faculty, staff and visitors while on campus, in the presence of others, in public settings, indoors and outdoors.

Standard lab attire and personal protective equipment (PPE) must also be worn in the laboratory, including long pants, enclosed shoes, lab coat and safety glasses.

Lab coats and other PPE should not be shared among lab personnel. Lab coats and PPE should be clearly marked with the name of the individual it is assigned to.

Cleaning and Disinfection

All work areas must be cleaned and wiped down daily when beginning work in the lab and prior to leaving the lab at the end of the day with an approved COVID-19 disinfecting product (70% ethanol or an equivalent solution). This includes all work surfaces and frequently touched surfaces (e.g., door handles, light switches and faucets).

Shared work areas and equipment should be cleaned and disinfected after each use.

When cleaning and disinfecting:

- Keep work area and lab bench neat to reduce clutter, allowing for more thorough cleaning and disinfection.
- If surfaces are visually dirty, clean with soap and water prior to disinfectant application.
- Use a COVID-19 approved disinfecting product (70% ethanol or an equivalent solution).
- Adhere to the manufacturer's recommended contact time for the disinfectant to determine how long the surface should remain wet for the disinfectant to be effective. The recommended contact time for 70% ethanol is one minute.
- Wear gloves or other PPE if recommended by the manufacturer when the disinfecting product is being used.
- Exercise caution as even 70% ethanol is flammable and can be ignited. Best practice is to saturate a wipe and apply to the surface.

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Contact Environmental Health and Safety Services (EHSS) for assistance selecting and obtaining a COVID-19 approved disinfecting product.

Hand Sanitation

Frequent handwashing is one of the most effective ways to protect yourself and others from getting sick.

- Wash your hands upon entering the lab and just prior to exiting the lab.
- Wash your hands frequently throughout the day with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Always wash your hands after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing and before you touch your eyes, nose or mouth.
- If soap and water is not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol).

Physical Distancing

Physical distancing requirements need to be maintained in the lab. It likely will not be possible for all lab members to be present in the lab at the same time. Laboratory principal investigators will need to evaluate their lab spaces and implement steps to meet physical distancing requirements. For shared spaces, this may require coordination with the other lab groups.

The following should be considered to help meet physical distancing requirements:

- If the work does not need to be done in the laboratory, it should be done at home or in another suitable location.
- Consider splitting the lab group into teams that will work during different shifts or on alternating days.
- Plan experiments prior to coming into the lab.
- Maintain at least six feet of distance from other people in all directions.
- Generally, occupancy should be limited to 1 person per laboratory bay, hood, glove box, biosafety cabinet, etc., at any time.
- Limit occupancy of shared office support space to one person at a time.
- Allowed occupancy should accommodate for uncongested egress and movement around the lab, especially in high traffic areas.
- Instructional activities and tasks which must be completed with closer contact, should be minimized to the greatest extent possible.
- Consider the use of floor markings or other demarcations to outline at least six feet of distance around workstations, lab benches and tables.
- Ensure lab members who are essential for the operation of specialized equipment or lab techniques make documentation available to other lab members in case they are not present in the lab or otherwise unavailable.

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- Ensure everyone has the necessary contact information for the other group members in case there are questions or issues with materials or equipment.
- Avoid running unattended processes, if possible, and post information about the hazards of a process or experiment and the name and phone number of who to contact for more information if you must leave it unattended.
- Plan to vacate the building at or before the designated time and leave ample time to clean and disinfect areas before you exit.

Although the number of people in the lab should be reduced, researchers should still avoid working alone in the lab. If working alone is unavoidable, procedures involving hazardous chemicals, materials and/or equipment should be reduced to the greatest extent possible. Individuals who must work alone in a lab and are working with hazardous chemicals, materials and/or equipment, to support essential functions, must coordinate with their principal investigator and establish a process to track and monitor when they are working alone in the lab (e.g., teleconference monitoring, text upon arrival and when exiting). Alternatively, they may also notify the Department of Public Safety and make them aware when they will be in the laboratory, and again, when they leave the laboratory.

Re-Occupancy Lab Check

Prior to the ramp up of research operations, conduct a pre-check of the laboratory condition and supplies before starting any lab work. The following should be assessed as part of this check:

- Confirm fume hoods, biosafety cabinets and other key safety equipment are operating normally, have current certification (if applicable) and alarms are not activated.
- Check status of equipment needed to support your research such as icemakers, cold rooms, refrigerators/freezers, sinks and autoclaves. Submit service requests or notify your department administrator if repairs are needed.
- Confirm you are using correct start-up procedures for critical pieces of equipment. If you are unsure, check the manufacturer's website.
- Confirm adequate personal protective equipment is available for near-term research needs.
- Confirm there is an adequate supply of soap and paper towels for hand-washing.
- Confirm there is an adequate supply of disinfecting product available in the lab for disinfecting work areas, equipment and frequently touched surfaces.
- Flush all sinks and eyewashes for five minutes.
- Assess what support services and deliveries (e.g., compressed gases, reagents, dry ice) are needed to restart research and determine whether those services are operational and will be available when you need them.

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- Anticipate delays in response and repairs and the possibility of limited personal protective equipment and other consumable supplies.
- Anticipate hazards associated with the start-up of equipment such as distillation systems, chemical vapor deposition systems, flammable/toxic gas distribution cabinets, etc. Plan to restart equipment when the process can be monitored for enough time to confirm safe continuous operation.
- Review scheduling plans and physical distancing requirements for core and shared laboratory facilities.
- Review your EHSS [My Lab Profile](#) for lab training requirements and update the lab's lab member roster. Confirm all lab members have current safety training.
- Continue to follow all standard laboratory operating and safety procedures

Shared Facilities and Equipment

Special coordination and consideration must be given for shared research facilities and equipment. Consider the following to maintain physical distancing requirements in open-access facilities and when using shared equipment:

- Establish a mechanism to schedule and reserve shared facilities and equipment.
- Minimize the time in these shared spaces.
- Disinfect shared spaces and equipment before and after each use. This includes all touchable surfaces. Ensure a disinfecting product is readily accessible in the space or near the equipment.
- If sharing PPE, such as laser protective eyewear, is unavoidable, the PPE must be disinfected before and after each use in accordance with the equipment manufacturer's disinfection recommendations.
- Ensure contact information is available for equipment stewards or facility managers who may not be onsite during all shifts.
- Understand that access to certain facilities may be affected by occupancy limitations.

Waste Management

Lab personnel should continue to manage chemical and medical waste according to standard lab practices and University policy. EHSS will continue to perform routine waste pick-ups in the labs. A waste pick-up can also be requested by completing the [EHSS Request for Service Form](#).

These guidelines are subject to change based on guidance from New York State and the Federal government, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). The Office of Research and Environmental Health and Safety Services will keep the most up-to-date information available on their websites at research.syr.edu and ehss.syr.edu respectively. Both are

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also available to assist and answer questions as researchers prepare to restart laboratory research on campus.

The most up-to-date COVID-19 information from the University will always be posted at syracuse.edu/coronavirus.