COVID-19 Guidance for Research Laboratories

Depending on the timeline and severity of COVID-19 infections, research laboratories and core facilities may have limited activity for 8 weeks or more. Laboratories and core facilities should therefore create and implement plans for safeguarding research programs, including but not limited to protection of animal subjects and human participants, specimens, data, and integrity of ongoing protocols. The plans should define the specific measures to be implemented that will operationalize guidance posted by UNC and ECU on slowing transmission of COVID-19, while minimizing impacts on research programs. Plans should include the following:

- **Suspending all non-critical experiments and prepare the facility for temporary suspension of activities**
- **If activities cannot be delayed or postponed**
  - Notifying the Department Chair of studies that will be performed
  - Minimizing the time on site personnel spend onsite
  - Minimizing the number of individuals in the laboratory at any one time
  - When feasible under the protocol, maintaining at least 6 feet between research team members
  - Requiring personnel that must work in close proximity to wear personal protective equipment that guards against spread of the virus to other individuals, specimens, equipment, and the facility
  - Disinfecting the laboratory after use, including lab benches, chairs, equipment, and common rooms
  - Analyzing the data remotely
- **Avoiding performing high-risk procedures alone.** When working alone is necessary, exercise extreme caution.
- **Notifying colleagues** when working alone for an extended period of time.
- **Identifying procedures and processes that require regular personnel attention** (e.g., cell culture maintenance, animal studies).
- **Identifying key personnel** able to safely perform essential activities to ensure continuity of your laboratory’s research capability, and designating these individuals to perform those functions as part of their assigned duties (e.g., ensuring liquid N₂ dewars are full, freezers are functional, cell lines are fed, etc.). These individuals must be designated as “Mandatory Employees” for the time that they are on campus performing these assigned duties.
- **Updating email and telephone contact information for critical staff, facilities staff, and EH&S**
- **Establishing a rotation/schedule for checking critical equipment and caring for specimens.** Adherence to the schedule should be documented.
- **Coordinating with Department of Comparative Medicine for care of animal subjects remaining in the vivarium**
- **Arranging for uninterrupted delivery or availability of key supplies, such as liquid N₂**
- **Shutting down non-essential equipment, including computers.**
- **Connecting critical equipment to emergency power circuits or uninterruptable power supplies.**
- **Securing high-risk materials (radioactive, biohazards, chemicals)**

**Notes**
Critical Researchers are not to take materials other than laptops, data storage devices, etc., offsite (e.g., to their homes) to ensure research continuity during a curtailment. All essential research must continue within the confines of appropriate laboratory space.

For regulated research, activities must comply with approved animal, human research subject, radiation, and biosafety protocols; and amendments to existing approved protocols must be approved prior to being implemented.