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2020-05-29 A Message from the Executive Vice Chancellor

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HEALTH SCIENCES

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UNMHSC Plan to Move Toward Full Research and Laboratory Activities – Initial Phase

During the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting shelter in place order, many non-essential research projects and laboratory activities were paused. Subsequent to June 1, UNM will move from our current state of limited operations to our initial phase of our movement toward full operations. For this initial phase, we will allow increased activity but not a full reopening. Cloth face coverings are mandatory in all Health Sciences Center common spaces. Buildings will remain mostly locked.

The [Health Sciences Center Office of Research website](#) contains information on specific research-related updates, including the Research Continuity Guidelines for both [Laboratories & Research Facilities](#) and [Clinical Trial Research Faculty & Staff](#).

We understand what a difficult time this has been for all, and the importance of the research that is conducted at UNMHSC. We are working hard to identify and address challenges to the conduct of research while protecting our patients, faculty and staff. Thank you for your cooperation and support.

A Message from the Executive Vice Chancellor and Vice Chancellor for Research

In order to ensure the safety of the UNMHSC laboratory and research communities, Safety Officers from the Office of Research will conduct routine inspections of each lab. Faculty, staff

or BSGP graduate students may not return to work until their laboratories are cleared by inspection as indicated below.

For research activity that is continuing subsequent to June 1, please follow COVID-19 Safe Practices

- Limit operations to remote work to the greatest extent possible.
- Arrange workplaces to provide for a minimum of 6 feet of distance between individuals.
- Close common areas where personnel are likely to congregate wherever possible or modify them to minimize contact.
- Provide for all meetings to take place remotely whenever possible. Education-related meetings such as dissertation defenses will follow the education return to work plan and timeline.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a face mask when around others and when moving through common spaces. Follow all PPE required by OSHA when in a laboratory (see instruction below). Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Routinely and regularly disinfect common contact sites (keyboards, door handles, multi-user equipment, etc.).
- For BSL-2 and BSL-3 work, please follow the PPE requirements for these activities.
- All employees will be provided with appropriate face coverings or provide their own prior to returning to work. Masks must be worn in the workplace.
- Train all employees on daily cleaning and disinfecting protocol, hygiene, and respiratory etiquette (e.g., covering coughs).
- Make handwashing, sanitizer, and other hygiene support available to employees.
- Prohibit employees with known close contact to a person who is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19 to return to work until the end of the 14-day self-isolation period.

Physical Distancing in the Laboratory and Research Spaces

- Only personnel with a need to access physical locations to advance research should be on-site. This may include faculty, staff, or biomedical sciences graduate program students.
- Other students should not be working in laboratories.
- Even personnel permitted should minimize time on campus.
- All others should remain sheltered-in-place and/or off-site to help maintain physical distancing. Meetings should be conducted remotely whenever possible. Supervisors are encouraged to continue to accommodate telecommuting schedules with Tier 2

employees, especially those who are immune-suppressed or whose childcare options are not yet available.

- Labs may not be authorized for access unless the following parameters are defined and readily available upon request to the Biosafety Officers. The PI in conjunction with the appropriate Dean, Cancer Center Director, Clinical and Translational Science Center Director or Vice Chancellor for Research who may have responsibility for the space will be responsible for assuring that no one accesses laboratory space until it is inspected. In addition, the same individuals are responsible for assuring and providing the following during their laboratory inspection:
- How many individuals will be in a space at any given time. Shift work will be necessary if social distancing requirements cannot be met.
- If necessary, a clear process to ensure work shifts do not accidentally overlap if 6 feet between people cannot be maintained during a normal working situation.
- A list of supplies provided to maintain safety and their storage location: face coverings, soap, hand sanitizers, cleaning materials, first aid kits.
- Procedures and schedule to clean/wipe down shared items, equipment, carts, and work surfaces prior to usage by others. Consult the [EPA List N for approved disinfectants against SARS-CoV-2](#) (COVID-19).
- A written process to maintain access and activity logs, either electronically or manually, in order to trace contact should someone become sick with coronavirus.
- Physical distance between people should always be maintained.
- Maintain a distance of at least 6 feet between people unless PPE appropriate for the context is used. Cloth face masks are not PPE.
- Laboratories and facilities with limited space that cannot ensure personnel will meet these public health requirements must remain off-limits.
- Some locations may choose to reconfigure interior space to relieve bottlenecks and maintain space between research personnel.
- Do not gather in groups of size more than what is limited by county officials. Research ramp-up should not result in crowded spaces or mass gatherings.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a face mask when around others and when moving through common spaces. Follow all PPE required by OSHA when in a laboratory (see instruction below). Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Routinely and regularly disinfect common contact sites (keyboards, door handles, multi-user equipment, etc.).
- For BSL-2 and BSL-3 work, please follow the PPE requirements for these activities.

- Employees will receive an email attestation each day to verify that they do not have symptoms of any type of sickness. Symptomatic individuals should not come to work. If a person becomes symptomatic while at work, immediately send them to Employee and Occupational Health, since they may or may not be COVID-19 positive. Depending on the nature of the employee's illness, they may be triaged to the Respiratory Care Center.
- Prohibit employees with known close contact to a person who is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19 to return to work until the end of the 14-day self-isolation period.
- Laboratories who do not meet and maintain COVID-19 Safe practices may lose their ability to operate.

Required Cleaning Procedures

- Decontaminate work surfaces and equipment with appropriate disinfectants. Use [EPA-registered and approved disinfectants](#).
- Disinfectants should be used with label claims to be effective against SARS-CoV-2. Follow manufacturer's recommendations for use, such as dilution, contact time, and safe handling. For example, you may use EPA registered disinfectants that contain 10% bleach solutions (0.5% sodium hypochlorite), ethanol /quaternary ammonium or > 0.5 hydrogen peroxide.
- Notify BHC (TMuller@salud.unm.edu or NDonart@salud.unm.edu) if you are utilizing another disinfectant, so a check of the disinfectant's active ingredients can be evaluated.
- Note: IBC/BHC approval is required to work directly with SARS-CoV-2 or known/suspected SARS-CoV-2 samples. All faculty and laboratory managers must ensure their personnel are using aseptic techniques when processing specimens. This includes disinfection of all surfaces and equipment using EPA registered disinfectants that contain 10% bleach solutions (0.5% sodium hypochlorite), ethanol /quaternary ammonium or > 0.5 hydrogen peroxide, both inside and outside of the biosafety cabinet.
- BSC surfaces must be rinsed with water 70% isopropanol after applying bleach to prevent metal corrosion.
- All manipulation of potentially infectious materials must be performed in certified biosafety cabinets, per standard BSL-2 or BSL-3 requirements or as approved by institutional biosafety committee or biosafety officer.

Required Personal Protective Equipment

- Please refer to the [CDC video demonstration of cleaning procedures as well as donning \(putting on\) personal protective equipment](#) (PPE). This video will be updated with a CITI training video when available.
- In addition to wet labs and research environments, masks must always be worn in common areas and open labs. All personnel will have to [provide their own cloth mask that meets CDC requirements](#), until the HSC receives a shipment of cloth masks.
- Per OSHA requirements and biosafety policies, all lab staff should have dedicated PPE within your laboratory for your experiments, including lab coats and appropriate facial protection.
- Per UNMHSC Biosafety Training for BSL-1 and BSL-2 laboratories, do not wear PPE (other than masks) outside of the non-lab areas.
- Depending on the number of labs you have and the nature of the work, researchers may need multiple lab coats for each area to avoid potential cross contamination.
- Wear a lab coat or solid-front back-fastening gown, preferably with a knit or grip cuff.
- For BSL-2 and BSL-3 activity, coverage of the wrists is very important. Avoid using an open-cuff lab coat inside a biosafety cabinet, as aerosols generated inside the cabinet will contaminate your jewelry, wrists, and forearms, as well as the inside of the lab coat cuff.
- For BSL-2 activity, ensure that your gloves extend over the sleeve of your lab coat. An opening at the wrist will allow aerosols generated within the biosafety cabinet to contaminate your wrist and forearm, extending to your elbow.
- Sleeve covers can be worn to ensure coverage of the wrist and will also minimize contamination of the sleeves of your lab coat.
- Each person in the lab should have their own pair of safety glasses. These can be sanitized after each use with 70% isopropanol and allowed to air dry.
- Wear a chin-length face shield or safety glasses and a mask if working outside of the biosafety cabinet with biohazards on the bench. This will protect the researcher's facial mucous membranes from exposure, in the event of a spill outside the biosafety cabinet during transfer of material to and from the incubator.
- Each person in the lab should have their own cloth face covering.
- N95 masks and other high demand PPE must be used only when appropriate and required for the laboratory environment and experiment.

- Cloth face coverings should be sanitized often. This can be accomplished by machine washing.
- Except for masks, remove PPE before leaving the laboratory. Placing a hook within the lab area will facilitate this requirement.
- If researchers have any questions regarding proper use of PPE in their specific situation, they should follow standard procedures for biosafety as outlined in our “Biosafety Training for BSL-1 and BSL-2 laboratories.” This includes not wearing gloves outside of the laboratory.
- If there are any questions regarding proper BSL-1 or BSL-2 training or use, please review your learning central training or contact the Office of Research Biosafety Team (TMuller@salud.unm.edu or NDonart@salud.unm.edu).

Clinical Research and Related Human Participant Research

We appreciate everyone’s heroic efforts to move study visits and assessments to remote and virtual platforms to the extent possible. When possible, please continue conducting study visits and assessments virtually. We recognize that some studies require in-person study assessments and procedures (imaging, blood draws, physical exams, etc.) that need to be re-started. We will allow an incremental increase in the recruitment of new study participants in a manner that attempts to reduce the risk of spreading infection in order to protect study and clinical staff, study participants, and others as appropriate.

- The possibility of COVID-19 infection will still be present after resuming research operations. This is part of the “new normal.” Investigators and the HRRC should re-evaluate research protocols and develop plans to manage.
- Studies with in-person procedures that were originally considered minimal risk (e.g., interviews, focus groups, blood draws, etc.) may need re-consideration as greater than minimal risk, due to the risk of COVID-19 infection.
- The risk-benefit analysis for a protocol may have shifted. The adequacy of provisions to minimize risk, to monitor safety, and to protect privacy and confidentiality may need to be re-evaluated.
- It may no longer be feasible to resume certain research as originally proposed and approved due to facility shut-downs, supply shortages, furloughs, etc.
- Please continue the non-contact screening protocol prior to all in-person research visits, to assess for active symptoms of acute respiratory infection possibly related to COVID-19.
- This may be accomplished by communication with participants, care providers, screening surveys, or other options.

- Participants should be screened for COVID-19 symptoms in UNM Hospital prior to entering any other areas on campus. They may also be screened prior to entrance to the building, and family members may not be allowed to accompany the participant to the visit.
- If family members are required participants in in-person study activities (e.g., pediatric studies), they must also be screened as above.
- If in-person visits are required and a suitable location for the visits and activities is available, continue to reduce exposure risk with the following steps:
 - Social distancing (minimum of 6').
 - Reduce the number of people in an exam room to no greater than 2 at a time.
 - Include a barrier between research personnel and participants.
 - Minimize the number of staff who have “hands on” contact with study participants.
 - Wear personnel protective equipment (PPE) including gloves, masks and, if appropriate, gowns.
 - Wash your hands before and after contact with participants.
 - Disinfect surfaces and equipment in the location of the visit before and after each participant visit with recommended products. Consult the [EPA List N for approved disinfectants against SARS-CoV-2](#).
- If research involves clinical areas, all regulations about the use of clinical space must be followed and study staff must coordinate visits with these areas prior to scheduling the in-person study visit and associated clinical activities.
- Studies that conduct quality assurance monitoring of their own or participating sites should consider how to adapt monitoring procedures to occur remotely.
- Possibilities might include email, conference calls, video conferencing, and approved secure platforms for exchange of files and data.
- Any reduction in the nature or frequency of HRRC-approved monitoring procedures should be approved in advance by the HRRC.
- Outside monitors are still prohibited from coming on-campus at this time.
- Please note that some study sponsors will not approve re-initiation of study visits and recruitment, and some hospital services will not yet be available for research use.

Community Based Research Work

For personnel engaged in community-based research (research outside of the UNM Campus),

personnel will continue to conduct research through the use of electronic methods - Zoom, phone calls, emails - to mitigate the chance of cross contamination between communities.

Travel to areas or communities who have not met the public health guidelines for reopening in New Mexico will not be permitted (there is more guidance on this issue to come). Essential, on-campus activities will be minimized to the extent possible, while still advancing research efforts.

When in-person visits are necessary and a location is available that meets the public health guidelines for reopening in New Mexico, continue to reduce exposure risk with the following steps:

- Wear a cloth mask at all times.
- Maintain physical distancing (minimum of 6').
- Reducing the number of people in a room to no greater than 3 at a time.
- Minimize the number of staff who have "hands on" contact with study participants.
- Wash your hands before and after contact with participants.

Health and Safety

A significant increase in the population density in our buildings comes with health risks, and we will need to be more vigilant than ever in mitigating these risks, as follows:

- If a worker feels any signs of illness, no matter how mild, they must not perform work of any kind in lab areas.
- All personnel working or learning at UNMHSC who test or have tested positive for COVID-19 at an outside facility must self-report the positive COVID-19 test result to the appropriate UNMHSC department, immediately stop working in lab areas and on site, and enter quarantine at home.
- Avoid social interactions and exposures to potentially contaminated surfaces during commutes, building entry and exit, elevator rides, movement in stairways, and bathroom breaks.
- Avoid common areas for lunch or coffee breaks unless you are alone or seated at distant tables; otherwise find an isolated location in lobby areas or outside the building.
- To reduce viral transmission between shifts, all labs should prepare spray bottles containing 10% bleach solutions (0.5% sodium hypochlorite), , >0.5 hydrogen peroxide based disinfectants (e.g., PREempt™) or ethanol/quaternary ammonium disinfectants (Virex®, QUATRICIDE®, Lysol® Disinfecting Wipes) to disinfect bench surfaces, door knobs, and equipment surfaces frequently, and at the beginning and end of a shift.

- After applying bleach to metal surfaces (1-minute wet contact time), surfaces should be wiped down with water or 70% isopropanol to prevent metal corrosion.
- Wash hands with soap regularly throughout the day, especially after removing gloves.
- Remove gloves before leaving the lab.
- Gloves should not be worn in hallways, elevators, or offices.
- If staff must use gloves outside the lab to avoid touching shared surfaces, then use different colored (clean) gloves to differentiate them from lab-use gloves.
- 1-3 people per elevator; wait for the next one if occupied.
- Bathrooms should be limited to 50% occupancy; leave and return later if you find that a bathroom is occupied by 50% or more.
- When physical distancing is not possible (lab or office spaces with corridors less than 6 feet wide), seek an alternate route or make your presence known verbally from 6 feet away.

Travel

Employees must self-report all out-of-county and out-of-state travel, and they must self-isolate for 14 days if advised by the University when self-reporting.

Avoid unnecessary business or personal travel. Staff who have participated in personal travel should take precautions prior to and when returning to work. If travel is required, self-report and follow instruction from the University upon self-reporting.

Staff who have received visitors to their personal households should take precautions prior to and when returning to work.

Animal Resource Facility Research

The ongoing ethical care and maintenance of animal populations and/or ensuring the ethical care and conduct of research with animal subjects remains an essential function of the ARF. As research operations involving animals resumes, please consider the following:

- Research involving animals should be limited to the ARF facility, unless resources required for such research is only available within the PI laboratory and approval for the function is granted by both the IACUC and the initial phase laboratory inspections.
- The possibility remains that a new phase of public health emergency may create a renewed need to shelter-in-place.
- Prior to ordering/obtaining new animals, researchers should consider the ramifications on their animal subjects of another rapid ramp-down.

- Many animal research studies are longitudinal and entail regular follow up of well-characterized cohorts. Delays in regular follow up may lead to data loss, loss of the cohort, and in some instances a failed study (i.e., lack of requisite data to address specific aims) after many years of investment.
- Since space is limited to 25-50 % occupancy, priority may be given to resuming these projects over starting new projects.

Sources

[CDC Infection Control and Disinfection Guidelines](#)

[CDC Cloth Mask Guidance](#)

[EPA Registry of COVID-19 Disinfectants](#)

[CDC Guideline for Disinfection and Sterilization in Healthcare Facilities](#)

Please note that [the University of New Mexico also has a webpage](#) that is updated frequently, if you have specific questions regarding the University's response to the ongoing situation.

The [Health Sciences Center Office of Research website](#) contains information on specific research-related updates, including the Research Continuity Guidelines for both [Laboratories & Research Facilities](#) and [Clinical Trial Research Faculty & Staff](#).