

## Guidelines for laboratory and animal research during the COVID-19 pandemic (*Revised 11/11/2020*)

A task force prepared guidance for laboratory researchers at Rush during the initial COVID-19 period in spring 2020. Because of the impending COVID-19 surge, as the number of cases in IL and at Rush have increased, the task force reconvened to plan for contingencies as we move into the period following this report.

The task force realizes that various phases of approved activities may exist due to the pandemic, and thus interpretation of essential activities, and restrictions on their continuation could be implemented if the anticipated surge results in the City/State moving to more tightened levels. Research operations may continue while precautions should be closely followed – this would constitute a Phase 2.5 in the scheme below. Individual departments and Principal Investigators may move to further define or restrict essential activities, rather than maintain this modified mandated phase if a team member tests positive and/or develops COVID-19 symptoms and has contacted others in the relevant research space at Rush. It remains vital that leadership require vigilant adherence to precautions by all team members to ensure that research studies can continue at Rush.

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The current [CDPH guidelines](#) include a revised Emergency Travel Order that reflects the changing nature of the pandemic and provides more specific guidance to travelers entering or returning to Chicago amid a surge in COVID-19 cases locally and nationally. Under the new system, states are placed in three categories – red, orange and yellow – based on the status of the outbreak in the states and how the data compares to the situation in Chicago. The revised guidance is:

- **Yellow:** States with a rolling 7-day average less than 15 cases/day/100k residents.
  - No quarantine or pre-arrival test required. Maintain strict masking, social distancing and avoidance of in-person gatherings
- **Orange:** States have a rolling 7-day average **between** 15 cases/day/100k residents and the Chicago rolling 7-day average (currently 60)
  - 14-day quarantine OR **pre-arrival negative test** no more than 72 hours before arrival in Chicago with strict masking, social distancing and avoidance of in-person gatherings
- **Red:** States have a higher 7-day rolling average of positive cases/day/100k Chicago residents.
  - 14-day quarantine

Based on data available on November 10, 2020:

- 6 yellow states (no requirements): New York, California, New Hampshire, Maine, Hawaii, Vermont
- 31 orange states and Puerto Rico (must quarantine or receive a pre-arrival negative test result): see map below
- 12 red states (must quarantine): North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana, Minnesota, Utah, Idaho, Kansas, Indiana

Please check the [CDPH website](#) for the most recent guidance.

### **General principles**

1. As education and research are cornerstones of Rush University's vital mission it is important that laboratory research, including animal research, continue at Rush in a manner consistent with the health and well-being of faculty, staff, trainees, and the public.
2. Research at Rush will be aligned and consistent with health and safety guidelines that have been recommended by the IDPH, Rush ID, and Rush Leadership.
3. Essentialism criteria will be employed, in which laboratory research is allowed to continue at Rush with minimal faculty/staff/trainee involvement, if a stay-at-home order is re-enacted. The COVID-19 Laboratory Research Task Force will consider studies for exceptions to the essential-only research policy as outlined below in Phase 2.
4. If there is a Stay-At-Home order issued either by the City of Chicago or the State of Illinois, only Essential Research will be permitted to take place on RUSH campus, however our understanding of SARS-CoV-2 is evolving and plans may be updated as additional information becomes available.

### **Phased approach to laboratory activities during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.**

Rush University will phase in or out a return of research faculty, staff, and trainees in a coordinated process to ensure appropriate physical/social distancing and availability of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Rush will assess expanded staffing based on the ability to control and manage specific work environments and necessity to access on-site resources. These decisions, once approved by University leadership, will be communicated through and monitored by Department Chairs.

The need to reduce the number of people on campus to meet physical/social distancing requirements will continue for some time.

### **Phases of laboratory activity**

**Phase 1:** Ramping down of lab activities; restriction of building access to essential personnel.

**Phase 2:** Performance of time-sensitive research whose pause would seriously damage future viability of the research program; ongoing research, particularly that with animal models, should also be considered essential and should be continued to a reasonable halting point in order to

judiciously use these animals as a resource; research that is clearly relevant to COVID-19 (Could be implemented during a City or State stay-at-home order)

**Phase 2.5:** Research operations may continue while precautions should be closely followed (could be implemented if the anticipated surge results in the City/State moving to more tightened levels).

**Phase 3:** Gradual, monitored restarting of some research and careful expansion (following lifting of any City or State restrictions).

**Phase 4:** Beginning of a return to normal operations with permanently enhanced safety guidelines.

At present we are in Phase 3 of the process, although we could return to Phase 2 or 2.5 should the City or State return to guidance suggesting more limited activity.

#### Laboratory research under Stay-At-Home orders

These guidelines will be effective should a Stay-At-Home order be enacted and remain in place until the end of the stay-at-home order

Under Phase 2. Essential research.

- Essential researchers only should perform maintenance-type laboratory work or work that is clearly relevant to COVID-19 and has been approved (see above).
- All personnel should follow the universal masking protocol (see above).
- Physical/social distancing should be followed at all times (see Figures attached).
- Personnel with a temperature of 100.4 F or higher and/or other symptoms (cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, headache, chest tightness, extreme fatigue, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea, muscle aches) should not come to work.
- This is voluntary work under the essentialism criteria. PIs cannot coerce their research staff to work and students should not be coerced to work.
- Department Chairs, or their designees will authorize the re-opening of specific labs and monitor their adherence to scheduling (see Figures attached) and safety policies.

#### Phase 2-3 transition periods

We propose requirements that apply to wet-labs as we transition between Phase 2 and Phase 3. While we have been operating in Phase 3 for some months and have brought more researchers back to campus, we recognize that Rush reserves the right to return to phase 2 or even 1 if the situation dictates, or to relocate or remove employees as needed. Our guiding principle is, and will continue to be, to mitigate health and safety risks to faculty, staff and trainees based on the advice of health care professionals and other experts.

To reduce the risks of faculty, staff and trainees potentially being exposed to SARS-CoV-2 in the workplace or exposing others, we should aim to keep the density of our workforce as low as possible at any given time and to create a balanced daily plan that maintains safe distances

between employees. The most important three elements that will help keep our faculty, staff, and trainees safe are: (i) wearing a Rush-issued face mask (ii) regular hand washing; and (iii) physical/social distancing. Compliance with the instructions outlined below, as well as from individual PIs, Department Chairs, and Rush administration should be required for continued access – to help ensure compliance violation could result in the revocation of building access privileges and/or other appropriate disciplinary action.

No two laboratories are alike. The directives listed here describe approaches devised in consultation with infectious disease experts and are in alignment with institutions across the country. There may be laboratory-specific safety issues that should be brought to the attention of individual PIs and/or Department Chairs. For example, some laboratory work may involve the frequent use of shared equipment, such as a microscope, and extra cleaning precautions should be taken to minimize the risk for coworkers using this shared resource. To reduce our collective risk as much as possible, a partnership must exist between each person working in a laboratory and the PI, Department Chair, building manager, and the University. A structure in which the four Rush buildings in which the majority of bench research occurs, have a point of contact person, Chris Kanakis, who will work directly with the University as issues arise. Mr. Kanakis (or Kristin Moody in the Cohn Building) should be the first point of contact for building-related issues.

### Staffing Options

There are several options departments can consider to maintain required physical/social distancing measures and reduce population density within buildings and work spaces.

**Remote Work:** Those who can work remotely to fulfill some or all of their work responsibilities may continue to do so to reduce the number of individuals on campus and the potential spread of SARS-CoV-2. These arrangements, which should be approved by the immediate supervisor, can be done on a full or partial day/week schedule as appropriate.

**Alternating Days:** To limit the number of individuals and interactions among those on campus, departments could schedule partial staffing on alternating days. Such schedules will help enable physical/social distancing, especially in areas with large common workspaces.

**Staggered Reporting/Departing:** The beginning and end of the workday typically bring many people together at common entry/exit points of buildings. Staggering reporting and departure times have been in place since the movement to Phase 3 and should be re-emphasized if a new stay-at-home order is enacted to reduce traffic in common areas to meet physical/social distancing requirements for essential researchers. A shift plan in which each laboratory defines when particular laboratory space will be used and the times of day during which individuals will work in the lab space was enacted during the shift from Phase 2 to Phase 3 and should be employed for essential researchers if there is a shift back to Phase 2.

### Safety Practices

**Face masks:** Face masks must be worn by all staff working on campus when in the presence of others and in public settings where other physical/social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., common work spaces, meeting rooms, classrooms, etc.). Appropriate use of face masks is critical in minimizing risks to others near you. You could spread SARS-CoV-2 to others even if you do not feel sick. The mask is not a substitute for physical/social distancing.

Disposable masks will be provided by Rush at the entries to research buildings. Disposable masks may only be worn for one day and then must be placed in the trash.

Restrooms: Use of restrooms should be limited, based on size, to ensure at least 6 feet distance between individuals. Signage should be installed to emphasize hand washing to reduce the potential transmission of the virus. Restroom cleaning should be emphasized to EVS/DFS.

Using Elevators: Signage should be installed to emphasize no more than two people entering an elevator at a time, use of the stairs should be encouraged by signage, as should hand sanitizer usage (Dispensers should be installed in buildings that do not have them near elevators) upon departing the elevator.

Kitchens: Kitchen refrigerators should not be used at this time because of the inability to monitor and keep them disinfected. Signage should be installed.

Comparative Research Center (CRC) Animal Facility:

- Proper PPE in the CRC includes a Rush issued face mask, gloves and covering or replacing of street clothes with a lab coat, yellow isolation gown or scrub uniform
- No more than two individuals may occupy and work in an animal holding room – this includes animal care technicians performing husbandry procedures.
- No more than 2 individuals may occupy and work in any procedure room in the CRC including the necropsy room, 047 Cohn
- No more than 3 people may occupy and work in a CRC surgery suite which includes at least one CRC certified veterinary technician monitoring anesthesia
- Teaching and training surgical labs requiring more than 3 individuals in a CRC surgery suite should remain suspended. Exceptions may be submitted to the Vice Provost for Research for consideration by the COVID-19 Laboratory Research Committee

Meetings: Convening in groups increases the risk of viral transmission. Where feasible, meetings should be held in whole or part using the extensive range of available collaboration tools (e.g. Zoom, WebEx, Microsoft Teams, Jabber, telephone, etc.). In person meetings should be limited to the restrictions of local, state and federal orders and should not exceed 10 people in a room, assuming individuals can still maintain 6 feet of separation for physical/social distancing requirements. Departments should remove or rearrange chairs and tables or add visual cue marks in meeting rooms to support physical/social distancing practices between attendees. Collegial communication by email, instant message, telephone or other available technology should be encouraged, rather than face-to-face meetings.

In addition:

1. Driving to work is encouraged.
2. Wipes should be provided in breakrooms, to clean highly used equipment such as coffee machines and microwaves.
3. Cleaning supplies should be provided on each floor, including bleach, sponges, and wipes.
4. Hand sanitizer should be provided near elevators, restrooms, and laboratories.

Criteria for faculty, staff, and trainee involvement in research during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Clinical and laboratory research are cornerstones of Rush University's vital mission. The guidelines for entry into the research environment during circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic are rooted in safety for the health and well-being of faculty, staff, trainees, and the public

Before faculty, staff, and trainees are approved to enter the clinical research or laboratory research environments, appropriate PPE must be available to all. To assure PPE is available, Department Chairs should communicate to their departments and/or Chris Kanakis regarding PPE needs so that appropriate orders can be placed in advance of personnel re-entry.

Faculty, staff, or trainees who have needs (health or otherwise) that would preclude them from participating in research at this time should seek accommodations according to the university guidelines for accommodations due to COVID-19 related issues. Personnel who have tested positive for COVID-19 should follow the Rush System for Health or University guidelines for personnel who test positive for COVID-19.

Personnel who test positive for COVID-19 or are having symptoms associated with COVID-19 infection must follow the Rush policy - <https://www.rushu.rush.edu/about/novel-coronavirus-covid-19-information/health>

Guidelines for faculty, staff, and trainees who have been infected with COVID-19

The following guidelines are in place to assure that faculty, staff, and trainees who perform research on campus, and who test positive for COVID-19, take the required precautions to assure they are taking care of themselves as well as protecting others around them. Faculty, staff, and trainees should adhere to the following guidelines if they have tested positive for COVID-19:

1. Faculty, staff, and trainees who test positive for COVID-19 must report this outcome to their supervisor and Rush Employee Corporate Health Services immediately.
2. Faculty, staff, and trainees who have tested positive for COVID-19 and/or in quarantine should comply with their treatment and inform their supervisor one day after they have been cleared to return to campus or research site. Faculty, staff, and trainees who are on campus should follow the guidelines for contact tracing according to Rush System for Health.
3. Faculty, staff, and trainees who intend to return to research environments on campus should provide Rush System's Return-To-Work form to Rush Employee Health.

Designated mask pick-up for different research buildings

Cohn	Cohn foyer
AAC	4 <sup>th</sup> floor entrance from the parking garage
MOR	1 <sup>st</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> floor elevators