

Important update on on-campus research activity

This message includes important information for all faculty, staff, and graduate students conducting research on campus.

Dear Colleagues,

As our communal response to the COVID-19 pandemic continues, we provide the following critical guidance and direction regarding conduct of research on campus. What follows applies to all research on campus. Certain details apply in particular to shared workspaces, including laboratories, workshops, studios, and group offices.

As background, we note the following:

- We are all responsible, as part of a collective public health response, for minimizing person-to-person contact through social distancing and de-densification. Per our email of March 14, you should already have taken steps to ensure social distancing, including suspension of activities that don't allow for it, and you should be directing people to work that can be done remotely.
- CDC guidance states that in the case of COVID-19 diagnosis of an individual who has been working in an area, no one is to enter the area for at least 24 hours, and then only after sanitizing procedures have been completed by Lehigh custodial teams. Considering the risk of such an occurrence, activities that cannot be safely shut down on short notice must be shut down as a proactive measure.

We ask that you take the following steps:

By 5:00 pm this Friday, March 20, bring your on-campus research activities to the point at which you can vacate your workspace within an hour or two, with assurance of safety, preservation of valuable materials, and minimal personnel required to accomplish shutdown.

This may involve immediate steps to ramp down operations that would take more than an hour or two to shut down completely. Confer with colleagues, with your department chairs, center/institute and facility directors, and, as necessary, your associate deans for research in formulating plans specific to the nature of the work and facilities in your area.

Allowances can be made for minimal staff to tend to cell cultures and similar materials. However, we recommend steps toward long-term preservation, such as freezing of samples. Access will be provided for continuing care of laboratory animals.

The department of Environmental Health and Safety is monitoring shutdown plans in areas identified as having special safety needs. EHS is available to consult with others. Please contact Barb Plohocki, director of EHS, at bap2@lehigh.edu or 610-758-4251.

Take aggressive steps to direct personnel under your supervision to working remotely.

Aggressive de-densification of work spaces reduces the risk to individuals, contributes to the public health effort, and will reduce the risk of an area becoming inaccessible.

Anyone in your group who is doing work that can be done remotely should already be working off campus. Think aggressively and creatively about how members of your team can contribute to the aims of your research without being on campus. While we do not pretend that all research can continue in the absence of our campus facilities, the nature of the public health crisis is such that we must be thinking this way now, and most likely will need to think this way for an extended period of time.

Prioritize safety, the needs of those under your guidance and supervision, and our role in the public health response.

Under no circumstances may a mentor or supervisor set an expectation of anyone who is sick, has reason to self-isolate or limit interactions, or is uncomfortable with doing so, to come to campus or to any particular workspace.

Acknowledge the unprecedented nature of the situation, for you and for those who depend upon you.

The prospect of loss—of time, of precious materials, of research results that people have labored for months to produce—is painful for everyone involved. It can also cloud judgment. The steps described here are intended to keep us focused for the moment on ensuring that we can move to a safe and stable state for the duration of the public health crisis. We can then turn to moving forward as a community. As we move through this initial period, please attend to your own needs so that you can remain sensitive to the needs of those who depend upon you.

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