

# UConn Research Lab Ramp-Up Preparedness Guide

The purpose of this guidance is to ensure the safe, phased reopening of University of Connecticut laboratories that were closed due to step-down directives associated with the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Please note that in order to resume operations, individuals must complete the [Resuming Research Activity form](#), submit a [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#), have documented completion of the [Returning to Research COVID-19 Safety Training](#), and be pre-approved by the Office of the Vice President for Research.

The goals of this plan are:

- Facilitate an orderly ramp-up of laboratory operations, personnel, and facilities
- Minimize staff exposure to potential COVID-19 cases to the greatest extent possible
- Restore all scientific research as soon as reasonably possible

All approved research must ensure compliance with federal and state regulations and University policies. In addition, lab personnel must also follow COVID-19 related directives and guidance from local, state, and federal authorities (e.g., required use of facemasks, social distancing, cleaning and disinfection, etc.).

## I. Daily Screening:

Early detection of illness can prevent the spread of COVID-19. Daily health monitoring is required. Lab personnel must notify their Principal Investigator or Supervisor if:

1. A person in your household has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or has demonstrated [COVID-19 symptoms](#) within the last 14 days
2. You have had close contact with anyone outside your home who has a confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis or COVID-19 symptoms within the last 14 days
3. You experience any of the following symptoms:
  - Fever that exceeds 100.4°F
  - Cough
  - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
  - Repeated shaking with chills
  - Chills
  - Muscle pain
  - Headache
  - Sore throat
  - New loss of taste or smell

Individuals experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or who have come in contact with others confirmed with COVID-19 or experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 **MUST STAY HOME**.

## II. Required Use of Facemasks:

Those individuals approved as essential to work on-site must wear facemasks or [CDC-compliant cloth face coverings](#) that cover the mouth and nose in UConn facilities to reduce the potential spread of COVID-19 from asymptomatic individuals. Facemasks must be worn in addition to the personal protective equipment used during laboratory operations, unless you are already required to wear a respirator. If the facemask or covering must be removed (e.g., to eat or drink), lab personnel must maintain a six foot distance from each other.

**Note:** Lab personnel are not required to wear a mask or covering if doing so would pose a risk to their health or safety because of a medical condition. Individuals at [higher risk for COVID-19](#) should work from home if possible.

### III. Pre-Occupancy Lab Preparedness

Prior to resuming research, lab personnel should ensure adequate supplies are available, equipment is operating properly, and services necessary to sustain lab operations are available. The list below can be used as a guide:

#### A. Safety Equipment/Supplies

- Confirm biosafety cabinets, fume hoods, and other safety equipment are operating properly and have current certification (if applicable).
- Ensure safety showers are unobstructed and eyewashes are functioning properly. Flush all eyewashes until the water runs clear.
- Confirm adequate waste-collection supplies (e.g., biomedical waste box-bag units, chemical waste containers, sharps containers, etc.) are available. Contact [EHS](#) for supplies as necessary.
- Ensure bleach and ethanol are available for inactivating biological waste prior to disposal.
- Confirm adequate personal protective equipment is available.
- Ensure an adequate supply of soap, paper towels, and disinfectant is available for handwashing and disinfecting surfaces.

#### B. Laboratory Equipment

- Check for unusual physical conditions (e.g., damaged equipment, leaks, fume hood alarms, etc.) in the lab and place work orders with [Facilities Operations](#) for repairs that need to be addressed.
- Use the correct start-up procedures for critical pieces of equipment.
- Contact the manufacturer, review operating manuals, and/or check the lab's standard operating procedures for safe start-up procedures, if needed.
- Restart equipment when the process can be monitored for enough time to confirm safe continuous operation.
- Anticipate delays for consumable supplies. Plan and order accordingly.

#### C. Support Services/Shared Facilities

- Confirm whether support services and deliveries (e.g., chemicals, compressed gases, dry ice, etc.) required for research are operational and will be available as necessary.
- Ensure that laboratory personnel or vendors who are essential for the operation or maintenance of specialized equipment in labs or shared facilities are available to assist as necessary.
- Investigate how other facilities such as core labs, sample/specimen suppliers, and other vendors will be managing their services to prepare for any additional requirements or delays.

### IV. Maintaining Social Distance During Lab Operations

Lab personnel must maintain a six-foot distance from each other during work activities, in addition to wearing a facemask or CDC-compliant face covering. The six-foot distance must be maintained in labs, offices, elevators, shared facilities, and any other area where two or more people come in contact. Planning and coordination by departments and labs are critical to ensure that the six-foot distance is maintained to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Planning considerations include:

- Conduct computational work at home (if feasible).
- Plan experiments prior to entering the lab to minimize unnecessary contact with others.
- Limit staffing to maintain social distancing.
- Consider splitting the lab group into teams that will work during different shifts or on alternating days.
- Determine which lab members require more supervision. Pair experienced researchers with more inexperienced researchers.

- Coordinate with other lab groups to ensure shared facilities and equipment are used at different times. Utilize a shared online calendar, post an hourly schedule or use another scheduling system.
- Ensure lab groups have contact information for all members who will not be present during their shift.
- Avoid working alone in an [immediately hazardous environment](#).
- Avoid running unattended procedures if possible. If necessary, post information about the experiment to communicate the hazards to others.

## V. Cleaning, Disinfection, and Personal Hygiene

Lab personnel must routinely wash their hands and clean and disinfect touchpoints in the workplace such as door handles, keyboards, tools, and equipment. Keeping the lab organized and free of clutter allows work areas to be properly disinfected. The following cleaning and disinfecting procedures must be followed:

- Wash hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. When soap and running water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand rub with at least 60% alcohol.
- Wear disposable gloves when cleaning. Gloves used in the laboratory must not be worn outside the lab.
- Use an [EPA-registered cleaning product](#) for disinfection. For destruction of coronavirus, a 70% alcohol solution can be used to disinfect surfaces.
- If surfaces are dirty, clean with a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- Disinfect equipment before and after each use. Place a spray bottle with disinfectant and wipes near shared equipment.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning and disinfecting cell phones, tablets, laptops, keyboards, and other electronic devices.

**Caution:** Some cleaning products, such as ethanol or isopropanol, are flammable. The best practice is to saturate a wipe and apply to the work surface rather than direct spraying.

## VI. Maintaining Flexibility

Circumstances may change rapidly and operations may need to be suspended on short notice. Before restarting a process, consider the time and steps necessary to safely shut it down again if necessary. Be aware of what equipment may need to be taken offline and what materials would need to be secured in order to ramp down your work. Refer to the [Laboratory Ramp-Down Checklist](#) for a list of considerations when shutting down the lab.

## VII. Emergencies

Emergency procedures will remain the same during the phased reopening of UConn laboratories.