

PHYSICS Department return to research activities- COVID-19 protection guidelines

May 2020

The safety and well-being of our students, staff and faculty is our top priority. Given the current COVID-19 crisis, successful restart of our research operations can only be done with precautionary measures in place at our facilities to keep everybody working on-site safe and informed. These measures include personal exposure and reporting guidance, physical distancing guidance and enhanced laboratory cleaning and disinfecting protocols.

The return to research activities is a privilege that can be revoked at any time.

- Every PI who decides to reopen their research labs must be prepared for a sudden shut down following University or government directives or should other circumstances arise that would limit activities (e.g., a reported case of a COVID infection in a lab group).
- Every PI must take responsibility not only for adhering to safety protocols but must ensure that such protocols are adhered to by personnel under their supervision or guidance.
- All PIs and personnel who are granted permission to pursue research have a duty of care for themselves and others to protect all from the transmission or exposure to the virus.

General precaution rules:

- Maintain the recommended distance of 2 meters at any time (in labs, offices, hallways).
- Regularly clean and disinfect with 70% ethanol any used surfaces (lab benches, desk surfaces, door knobs, etc.). *Note: Ethanol or other alcohols will craze (crack) acrylic surfaces. For an alternative, check the list of hard-surface disinfectants approved for use against COVID-19 by Health Canada (<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html#tbl1>).*
- If you have access to masks (surgical or reusable), please use them.
- If you feel sick or experience any symptoms (including seasonal allergies) - stay home and inform your supervisor as soon as possible.
- Be prepared to shut down at the end of every day (i.e., leave any equipment, supplies and experiments in a state that can be left unattended safely for days). Provincial or University rules could change at any time depending on the COVID-19 situation.

Common areas

All common areas such as the library, kitchen and lounge areas remain closed. Lunch/coffee breaks should be taken individually outside of the building or at one's desk, and any gathering of groups must be avoided.

Stairwells and Elevators

Most stairwells will be designated for one-way traffic. You may need to take a detour to reach your destination. When encountering others, walk at the right side and do not stop.

Elevators should only be used if materials/supplies need to be transferred with carts.

- Take stairs instead of elevators if possible.
- One person at a time in elevators.
- Use your elbow or a pen to punch elevator buttons rather than your finger.
- Exiting elevator: If someone is in the hallway, allow them to pass before entering hallway.

Lab Spaces

Given the current COVID-19 prevention procedures, all research activities in the labs regardless of their nature should be done following these protocols. As such:

- Hands must be washed for at least 20 seconds upon entry and before leaving the laboratory: thoroughly wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or utilize an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with 70-95% alcohol.
- Put on disposable gloves after hand washing and prior to starting work in the lab.
- Frequently use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with 70-95% alcohol or spray bottle with 70% ethanol for disinfection of the gloves.
- Prior to use wipe down the work area using disinfectant wipes or a 70+% alcohol solution (*An alternative disinfectant should be used for acrylic surfaces. Refer to the complete list of hard-surface disinfectants approved for use against COVID-19 by Health Canada*).
- When work is complete or the users stop work for >30 minutes, the work area should be wiped down again.
- Remove and dispose of gloves before leaving the lab. Use proper technique to remove gloves. Put on new gloves when re-entering the lab.
- Gloves should be worn in any of the shared spaces/facilities, equipment rooms, etc.
- If using disposable masks: remove mask before leaving the lab and replace with a fresh mask. Use proper technique to remove a mask.

Laboratories can only reopen if the supervisors can ensure that at any time physical distancing of minimum 2 meters is followed between the lab benches/workstations as well as between the sitting desks inside the labs.

- This may require rearranging bench space and shared equipment.
- For larger groups - supervisors will have to implement shift work that best works for their group research needs in order to implement physical distancing. For example, shifts can be based on a day on/day off schedule or a morning vs afternoon schedule.
- Equipment and other surfaces touched (door handles, chairs etc) should be disinfected at the end of each shift.
- Implement a break of at least 30 min between shifts, to avoid contact between the different shifts.
- If working alone, the guidelines of [Policy GP 39 \(Working alone or in isolation\)](#) must be followed.
- Supervisors should use their best judgement in deciding who of their personnel (graduate students, staff) can continue working from home (for example, if they are writing publications, thesis, etc.). The return to on-campus research activities is focused on research personnel for whom labs are essential to their research, and to fulfill the obligations of graduate training and research grant activities (grant funding, thesis completion, etc.). With the exception of students holding a USRA, neither undergraduate students nor volunteers are allowed in the labs at this time.
- Users are required to post a sign that the station or lab area is "In Use" for the day (or for the shift) if other users are expecting to have access to the space at a different time.
- When finished with the station remove the "In Use" sign and clean up your area. If you need to leave equipment set up, leave a note indicating when you will need to use this area again. The maximum occupancy of the lab will be defined by the number of stations. Do not exceed this number of people.
- Upon exiting any lab space, if someone is in the hallway, allow them to pass to maintain safe distancing.

Waste disposal

In order to reduce the presence of janitorial staff inside the lab, regular laboratory waste can be collected by a designated research group member in a clear garbage bag. The bag should be sealed/closed and garbage left on the hallway by the lab entrance for easier pick-up by the janitorial staff.

Biohazard waste will be picked up on a bi-weekly schedule. Labs that generate larger volumes of biohazard waste will have to autoclave their own biohazard waste using autoclave tape to

indicate successful sterilization. Autoclaved biohazard waste can be stored in the laboratory until pick up time.

Shared facilities

Rooms with shared equipment or shared instrument rooms can be used following these rules:

- Only one person will be allowed to enter the room unless distancing can safely be maintained.
- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer before and after entering the room.
- The doors to the shared facilities rooms should always be kept closed (liquid nitrogen and helium rooms, x-ray diffractometers, vibrating sample magnetometer etc.), except if for safety reasons they should be kept open while the room is in use (e.g., Chem Prep Room, student shop). An “in use” sign indicates that somebody is using the room. If the room is not in use, you can enter and place the “in use” sign on the door. Do not forget to remove the sign when leaving the room.
- Spray bottles containing 70% ethanol will be located in each of the shared rooms.
- Prior to, and after, each use of shared equipment use wet kimwipe or a paper towel with 70% ethanol to wipe down any instrument parts that you have touched: knobs, controls, displays, keyboards, eye pieces (for microscopes), etc.

The safe return to research activities can only be successful with everybody’s participation and taking personal responsibility. When in doubt, err on the side of safety. Bullying and harassment of students, staff or faculty members who are following the safety rules will not be tolerated.