

Guidelines for the Reopening of MSK Research Laboratory Activities



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MSK Laboratory Emergency Taskforce

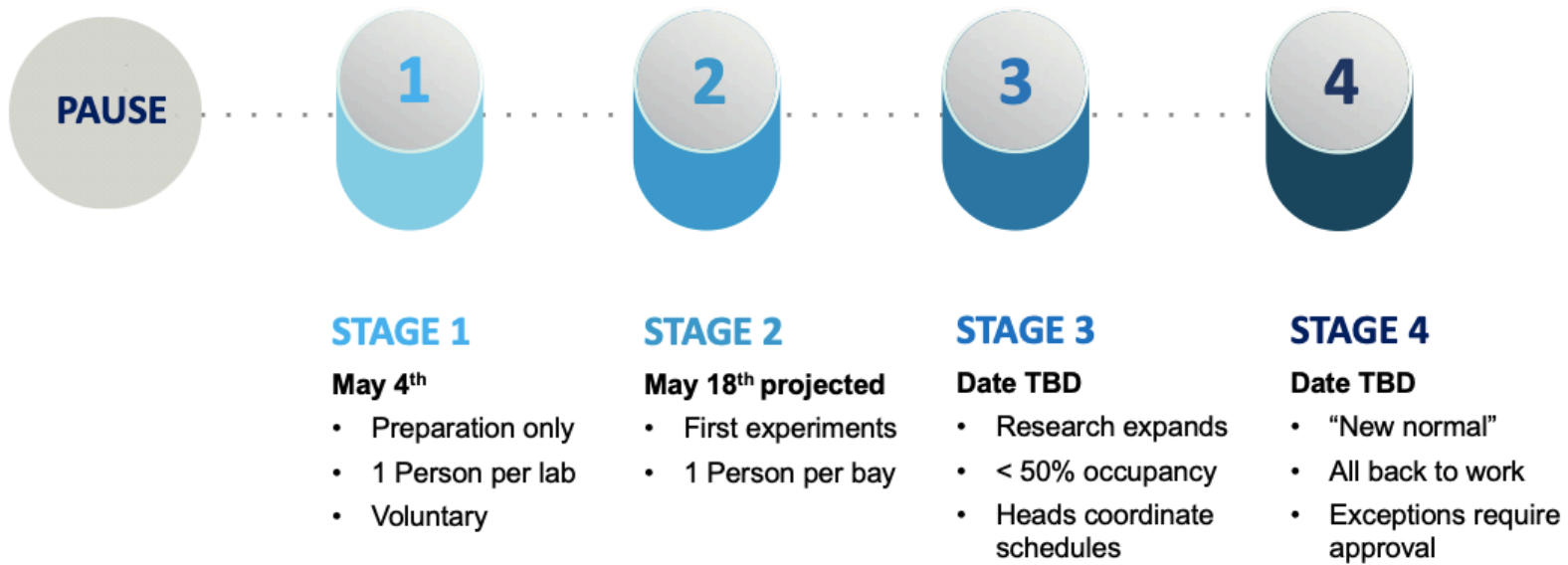
May 1, 2020

[Reopening On-Campus Lab Research](#)

The incidence of COVID-19 infection in NYC appears to be declining, which should allow a staged reopening of laboratory activity at MSK. Despite this good news, all staff must remain vigilant and remember that COVID-19 will remain part of our lives for the foreseeable future. We must continue to carry out measures to prevent workplace transmission. It is incumbent on each staff member to adhere to community guidelines as we continue to actively communicate.

These guidelines provide a framework for our operations and we must adjust our attitudes and expectations accordingly, with appropriate flexibility. We are working to have all these guidelines implemented in the coming weeks. Social distancing and other measures to prevent contact with the virus are our best defense. Therefore, the policies below are intended to minimize viral exposure, but cannot apply to every situation that may arise. For this reason, each lab or unit must adapt its protocols to adhere to these guidelines, with safety as the paramount objective. Violations of these policies should be reported to the Laboratory Emergency Taskforce (LET).

[Reopening Plan at a Glance](#)



General Policies and Procedures

1. Health protocols for COVID monitoring in MSK laboratory research staff:

- OneMSK provides fundamental information concerning [employee health related to COVID](#).
- Comprehensively, all MSK employees and non-employee laboratory research staff are required to use the MSK Health Check tool each day before leaving for work:
<https://redcap.mskcc.org/healthcheck>
- Staff who are cleared to work each day will receive an automated email notification from the HealthCheck tool, which must be forwarded to the supervisor or their designee before entering the building. It is the responsibility of each supervisor to confirm that all staff in their labs are approved for work each day.
- The HealthCheck tool will direct symptomatic staff into the separate online [COVID Employee Screening Tool](#) that will allow them to access COVID testing, if appropriate, through MSK.
- Symptomatic staff who test negative may not work onsite until they are asymptomatic, defined as 72h without fever and with improving respiratory symptoms, except when symptoms are diagnosed to be due to non-infectious causes such as allergies.
- Staff who test positive will be managed by the MSK COVID employee management system, which is already in place.
- At present, there is not sufficient testing capacity to screen laboratory research staff who are asymptomatic. This policy will be revised if that situation changes.
- It is of critical importance that no one report to work with any potentially infectious illness, independent of and in addition to the assessment of the Health Check tool. Supervisors must emphasize this to their staff and actively discourage our shared common tendency to work through illness. Doing so puts the entire community at risk. This behavioral change is a critical containment measure.

2. Masks are mandatory in all facilities at all times.

- Universal masking is required at all times in all MSK facilities. This policy will be enforced by Security at building entrances. Supervisors are responsible for enforcement in their labs. All staff are encouraged to exercise their prerogative to request a fellow staff member to wear a mask. Signs will be posted stating this requirement.
- Exceptions to this requirement are individuals isolated in a closed, private office, and as briefly as possible when eating while maintaining social distancing in lounges.
- MSK Security will provide a disposable facemask (procedure mask) to each staff member upon

entering the laboratory research building each day. Staff should wear their own PPE to their lab/office and then don MSK-provided facemasks before beginning work. MSK-provided disposable facemasks must be thrown out as regular waste at the end of the shift to avoid transferring chemical or biological contaminants outside the lab. Staff should then don personal PPE before leaving their lab/office at the end of their shift.

- d. Use of personal N95 masks is strongly discouraged as these are only required for direct patient care of COVID+ patients.

3. Procedures for a staff member who develops symptoms in a lab research building:

- a. If a staff member who was previously cleared to work under HealthCheck later develops symptoms (fever, cough, difficulty breathing, body aches or chills), the individual should immediately notify their supervisor and return home. The staff member should then use the COVID-19 Employee Screening Tool from home to determine if testing is needed. Staff should not go to the Employee Health and Wellness Office for testing. Staff will be given instructions on how to proceed based on their screening assessment.
- b. Staff should be aware that transient passage in hallways or labs when masked is not considered a close contact and that the CDC's definition of a contact is less than 6 feet for more than 10 minutes.
- c. Supervisors should follow HICS guidance regarding communication and notification of other staff of the potential exposure.

4. Hand hygiene

- a. Frequent hand washing with soap and water for 20 seconds is strongly encouraged to reduce contact transmission.
- b. Hand sanitizer will continue to be available at all lab building entrances.
- c. Additional hand sanitizer dispensers will be installed in elevator bays on all floors, and, as supplies permit, individual hand sanitizer bottles will be available at Security for use in the building.

5. Environmental cleaning

- a. Elevators, doors & handles, bathrooms, fixtures, lounge tables, and lounge chairs are being cleaned several times per day. This frequent cleaning by MSK Environmental Services will continue for the duration of the pandemic.

6. Elevator use to be minimized

- a. To minimize contact in elevators, stairs should be used for any travel less than 3 flights.
- b. Stairwells will be accessible from the ground floor in RRL, but this is not possible in ZRC due to the location of the doors on the building exterior.
- c. Stairwell traffic will be one-way, except in case of emergency: in ZRC, travel up via the North and Center stairwells, down via the South stairwell; in RRL, travel up via the East stairwell, down via the West stairwell. However, in the event of an emergency, follow building evacuation procedures and guidance provided by the Fire and Life Safety Director.
- d. In ZRC, elevator traffic up from the ground floor will be divided between A-bank elevators for floors 2-6 and B-bank elevators for floors 7–21. Signs will be posted in ground-floor elevator lobbies with these directions.
- e. A set maximum number of people will be allowed on a single elevator at any given time to maintain social distancing. Signs will be posted in all elevator bays and cars with this restriction.
- f. All staff must maintain 6-ft social distancing when waiting for elevators. Labs should stagger shift start times to avoid bottlenecks waiting for elevators.

7. Laboratory schedules

- a. All staff should be prepared to resume their laboratory duties as required upon phased reopening.
- b. Supervisors should work with their staff to arrange work schedules that adhere to staffing restrictions specified in the Reopening Schedule section below.
- c. In alignment with effective resumption of laboratory activities, individual circumstances should be considered toward the development of lab schedules.
- d. Childcare Assistance: Staff requiring childcare assistance should refer to the [expanded backup childcare resources available on OneMSK](#).
- e. Transportation: Staff whose usual means of transportation are disrupted or who do not want to take mass transit may be eligible for reimbursement of their commuting expenses. The availability of this benefit may change and staff are encouraged to refer to the [Commuter Assistance](#) page for updates.
- f. Medical Accommodations: Staff who need an accommodation, such as working from home due to their own medical condition when they are otherwise being asked to be onsite, must submit a request for a [Workplace Accommodation](#).
- g. In the event that the supervisor and staff member cannot reach a mutually agreeable lab schedule, the issue should be referred to an HR Business Partner who will ensure adherence to MSK-wide policies.

8. Measures to maintain social distancing in labs

- a. Labs should develop staffing schedules that will promote adherence to distancing guidelines. These could include shift work, off hour work arrangements, and hood schedules for work alcoves.
- b. For shift work, some employees may be eligible for differential pay (excludes trainees). Please consult with an HR Business Partner before proceeding.
- c. Even while working in shifts, all standard safety rules still apply. There must be a FDNY C14 Certificate of Fitness holder present in the same room or a contiguous lab area for research involving chemicals, including ethanol, chloroform, polyacrylamide, etc.
- d. Lab coats should be worn at all times in the laboratory and must be removed outside the laboratory.
- e. We encourage each staff member to give frequent attention to decontaminating commonly used surfaces (desks, benches, instrument panels, keyboards, cabinet handles, etc.).
- f. Each procedure room (tissue culture, fume hood alcoves, instrumentation rooms, cold rooms, etc.) will be posted with a maximum occupancy. Supervisors will be provided with template signs by EHS to be posted in every room associated with their laboratory. Room occupancy limits must be adhered to by all lab staff and enforced by the supervisor.

9. Laboratory safety

- a. MSK requires each person working in a lab to have a current C14 Certificate of Fitness from the FDNY. If you do not have a current C14, please follow the steps [on OneMSK to apply for one](#).
- b. EHS has created a [Laboratory Reopening Checklist](#) that will be used as part of the laboratory reopening inspection process. Labs are encouraged to use this checklist in their own planning.
- c. Staff should take inventory of chemicals currently in stock prior to ordering additional supplies, to prevent having surplus amounts of supplies and dangerous quantities of chemicals in the lab. Inventory can be reviewed in the [ChemTracker system](#).
- d. If you are experiencing Supply Chain issues, please contact EHS for assistance.
- e. For more information on specific safety requirements and topics, review the [EHS website on OneMSK](#) and visit our growing [Fact Sheet library](#).

10. Lounges

- a. Staff must maintain strict 6-ft social distancing at all times when in lounges. Tables and couches will be separated by 6 feet, with a strict limit of 1 chair per table.
- b. Staff may remove masks while eating but must minimize the amount of time that they are unmasked.

11. Core facilities

- a. Samples delivered to core facilities must be placed in drop boxes to minimize personal contact. Drop-offs should be coordinated in advance. Core facility ramp up may not be able to coordinate with that of individual labs requiring their services, so PIs must consult with Core heads when experiments resume.

12. Meeting policies

- a. No visitors or guests will be allowed into MSK research buildings until further notice. Vendors are allowed by appointment only to conduct essential instrument repairs.
- b. All meetings will continue to be held virtually including lab meetings, work/research-in-progress meetings, faculty meetings, etc.
- c. Seminars must continue to be held virtually until further notice.
- d. In-person meetings that are absolutely essential must adhere to room occupancy limits and social distancing guidelines.
- e. Conference rooms will be limited to a specific number of persons at a time (which will be posted) for staff to eat meals and for essential meetings only.

13. Ordering, procurement, and receiving

- a. Procurement is aware of our plan to open the labs and is prepared to partner with the cores and labs to order the lab supplies that are needed. They will also make our high-volume vendors aware, so they are prepared to process our orders.
- b. There may be delays in receipt of some supplies due to limited availability so please plan ahead.
- c. We ask that you organize supply reordering at the Lab or Core level and that the labs/cores order supplies they will need for a 2-week period of time. This will help minimize ordering bottlenecks and will help ensure timely delivery by receiving.
- d. Critical PPE items that are in short or limited supply nationally, including gloves and masks, are now ordered centrally by the Supply Chain team and are distributed to MSK sites based on need. PPE will be available to MSK Labs and Cores and a distribution process is being developed. Additional information will be shared soon.

14. Animal facility operational policies and procedures

- a. The Center of Comparative Medicine and Pathology (including RARC and LCP) will stage and harmonize operational changes with MSK's reopening of lab research.
- b. New procedures for animal facility access have been developed and must be followed.
- c. The number of active animal holding rooms at ZRC will be increased in phases to ensure facility users have ample space to expand their colonies.
- d. Effective May 4th, laboratories can:
 - Set up breeding pairs by reservation.
 - Place and receive animal orders from non-commercial vendors.
- e. Additional [details and newly developed operational procedures](#) will be provided by email and will be available on RARC's and the LCP's web sites.

Reopening Schedule

Dates below are tentative and are subject to change as required by NYS policies, availability of core facility services, or the decision of LET. LET will announce definitive dates for each upcoming stage as early as possible.

Stage 1 (Preparatory): Beginning May 4, 2020, a maximum of one lab member per laboratory group can be present in the lab during normal work hours (lab members may also work in shifts, limited to one person at a time in the lab). This period is only for preparatory activities for lab reopening, such as receipt of supplies, mouse breeding, cell line recovery, etc. The number of lab members allowed in the mouse facility will be as specified under separate RARC guidelines. Supervisors with an individual private office may go to their office.

Stage 2: Projected no earlier than May 18, 2020, supervisors may schedule one person per lab bay at a time who voluntarily wants to carry out research activities, not limited to normal work hours. Staff should consult with core facilities to plan experiments based on core capacity. Core facilities may be returning on a different schedule as directed by Robert Benezra, Diane Tabarini, and Neil Lipman. Administrative staff presence should be minimal to maintain low density of staff.

Stage 3: Projected no earlier than two weeks after the start of Stage 2, labs may schedule lab occupancy of up to 50% of the normal staff capacity of the lab at any one time, and these staff must maintain social distancing by working diagonally from one another, not working back-to-back at the bench or sitting back-to-back at desks.

Stage 4: On a date to be determined, all staff will return to normal work schedules, but under safety measures that LET determines to be appropriate at that time. Exceptions to working on campus will require approval by the supervisor.

MSK Laboratory Emergency Taskforce

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