Research mid-Covid-19

These are the principles and procedures we will be following in the Department of Microbiology and School of MCB. Failure to comply with departmental and school requirements can result in discipline and loss of access to MCB facilities and working areas including research areas.

There is a link on the Microbiology web site where an individual can anonymously raise any concerns regarding safety and practices around research.

The CDC defines “contact” as spending 15 mins within 6 ft of the infected person. Data from NY suggests that contact (as defined above) with an unmasked infected person gives a 15% chance of infection. Masks should diminish this rate.

TESTING

Our goal is to preclude infected individuals from being in the laboratory buildings. The testing protocols established on campus are critical for achieving this goal and keeping everyone safe. Testing is easy and takes only a few minutes. Testing sites include the Krannert Center off Oregon St, Campbell Hall off Lincoln, Foellinger Aud and the Union. Testing is free. You only need your ICard. Results are usually obtained in <24 hrs. All employees who are working in on-campus facilities are required to participate in the on-campus testing program. The “Safer Illinois” phone app is designed to facilitate compliance by providing testing notification and results. The app does NOT track or collect any smartphone data, including location.

1. All MCB personnel working in any of the buildings (RAL, CLSL, Morrill, MSB, or Burrill) MUST begin testing the week of Aug 10-14, before the new graduate students and undergraduates arrive on campus. This includes all faculty, staff, graduate students, postdocs and scientists.

2. All personnel should be tested regularly thereafter, once or twice per week following campus recommendations.

3. Those visiting the campus only occasionally (for example, picking up something from their office) or upon returning from a trip will be required to have test results dated no more than four days prior to entering any university facility.

4. No one can enter the buildings if they have tested positive for COVID-19, if they have missed a mandatory test, or if they are currently awaiting a test result after notification of exposure.

5. We hope that if an employee tests positive, he/she would let their PI/supervisor know. Given privacy rules, this notification is NOT required, but it will facilitate any required follow up actions, such as shutting down the lab/workspace and initiate the process of safeguarding others who might have been exposed.

Employees testing positive will be contacted by the Champaign-Urbana Public Health District (CUPHD) for isolation follow up. You must notify your supervisor of the potential length of your absence. When informing your supervisor that you will be off work due to illness, you are not required to inform your supervisor of your COVID-19 diagnosis, although you can choose to do so to safeguard others who came in contact with you. If you wish to utilize the benefits afforded by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, you will need to confirm that you have a COVID-19 diagnosis. If you feel well enough to do so and your work can be completed remotely, you can continue to work remotely, in consultation with your supervisor/PI.
6. If you test positive for COVID-19, you will receive specific guidance from CUPHD who will be doing contact tracing to identify those individuals with whom you have been in close contact. This is the information that determines successful contact tracing so that those individuals can be tested and watch for symptoms. The CUPHD will determine who will need to self-quarantine based on the criteria for close contact.

Once the PI/Supervisor and Dept. Head are notified that a person working in their laboratory/workspace has tested positive, they will arrange that the lab/workspace is closed immediately for 24 h and then cleaned by F&S staff (initiated by Dennis Dalby). This will be done without divulging the identity of the infected individual. Unless the infected person performed work in a second lab, other labs on the same floor will not need to shut down.

7. The infected individual must immediately isolate themselves, following the directions from the CUPHD who will contact them. Recommendations from CUPHD take precedence, but CDC guidelines for returning to work are:

If you had symptoms -
- At least 10 days since symptoms first appeared and
- At least 24 hours with no fever without fever-reducing medication and symptoms have improved

If you did not have symptoms -
- 10 days have passed since positive test

Testing becomes less useful once someone has been infected because the test can remain positive for a period despite the fact that the individual is no longer contagious. It is my understanding is that the “Safer Illinois” takes this into account.

8. Lab members who were in contact with the infected person (per the CDC definition) must also follow the directions from the CUPHD. In general, they should immediately self-quarantine for 14 days or receive a negative test after 5-7 days. They may then return to the lab. If they develop symptoms or have a positive test, then they fall into the categories above.

9. Other individuals may choose to stay home, even if their interaction with the infected person did not meet the CDC definition of contact. Of course, everyone can get tested regularly, but realize that it will take several days after contact to become positive.

ADDITIONAL POLICIES

Each lab will have specific policies pertaining to their space and personnel. These policies can be more stringent than those listed below. The general policies to be followed in Microbiology are:

1. All individuals working in Microbiology laboratories must watch the COVID-19 training video available at https://ovcrportal.research.illinois.edu/Training/Overview.aspx?TrainingId=295. You will acknowledge completion of this training in an email to your advisor (see pt 2).

2. This document and lab-specific plans will be included in the labs “standard operating procedures”. You must read these documents and acknowledge having read them in an email to your advisor. (One email can confirm both online training and acknowledgment of procedures.)

3. Do NOT come into the building if you have any symptoms consistent with Covid-19 or if you have been in contact with anyone who is infected. Symptoms include cough, shortness of
breath or difficulty breathing, fever, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell. Symptoms can be mild, and the range of symptoms associated with COVID-19 are constantly being updated as we learn more about the disease.  

Get tested!

4. Social distancing will be maintained (no less that 6-foot separation) at all times.

5. All researchers are to wear Personal Protective Equipment appropriate to the research being conducted (gloves, lab coats, goggles, etc.) at all times, just as you did in the past.

6. IN ADDITION – all personnel will wear cloth masks covering their mouth and nose while they are in the building, independent of previous lab practices or designated biosafety level for their laboratory. Masks can be removed ONLY if you are alone in a room.

7. No more than 2 individuals will be present within a laboratory module at one time, no more than 1 individual per laboratory bay. These requirements could vary depending on laboratory layout or individual lab policy. The requirement is to maintain at least 6 ft distance between individuals.

8. Use of smaller rooms is laboratory specific, but in general, only one person should be in these smaller rooms at one time.

9. No one will work alone in the lab, particularly at odd hours, without explicit permission from their PI. This is standard lab safety.

10. Everyone will wash their hands often with soap and water, including upon entering and before leaving the laboratory.

11. In addition, hand sanitizer will be available in public areas. Please use it to limit contamination of commonly contacted surfaces – door handles, elevator buttons, etc.

12. All individuals should wipe down laboratory benches, handles, drawer pulls, etc. using 10% bleach (made daily), 70% ethanol or isopropanol, or other EPA-approved disinfectant upon entering and leaving the laboratory.

13. Common equipment must all be cleaned thoroughly before and after use, likely with 70% alcohol.

14. All labs will have a google doc schedule indicating when personnel are allowed in the lab. This is designed to maintain the personnel limits above. It is recognized that the schedule can be altered in real time.

15. All labs will maintain a google doc sign-in sheet on which individuals will note the time that they enter and leave for the day. This is designed to allow subsequent contact tracing if someone should be identified as being infected.

16. Work hours are arranged in shifts to provide all staff with laboratory access.

17. Only laboratory work is to be conducted in the laboratory. Other activities, including, but not limited to, analysis, reading, writing, eating, computer use, are to be conducted outside of the laboratory space and preferably outside of the building.

18. Consistent with the above, anyone who can work remotely should do so.
19. No meetings with more than 5 people are permitted and ONLY if social distancing is maintained and masks are worn at all times. Larger laboratory meetings will continue to be held via zoom or other online format.

20. All common areas (lunchroom, study space, conference rooms) in the Department are off limits to more than one person at a time.

21. Avoid areas of contact when possible. Travel outside rather than cutting through buildings. Use the elevator only if necessary, etc.

22. Only authorized personnel are allowed in the building – no visitors.

23. F&S staff will ensure frequent sanitizing of commonly touched surfaces and restrooms.