

RETURN TO RESEARCH – POLICY AND PLAN FOR PHASE TWO REOPENING OF BENCH LABORATORY RESEARCH AT OUHSC

*This plan goes into effect **Monday, August 10** and replaces the prior *Return to Research – Policy and Plan for Phase One Reopening of Bench Laboratory Research at OUHSC**

The Phase One Return to Research Plan has allowed for the successful, gradual, and phased reopening of bench laboratory research. One key component of Phase One was the population density limit of one researcher for every 400 sq ft of laboratory space. This conservative population density was established to minimize COVID-19 risk in the research environment while the Vice President for Research (VPR) evaluated the effectiveness of the reopening plan. Based upon that review, the VPR, in consultation with Specific Pathogens Preparedness Operations Team (SPPOT) and OUHSC Emergency Operations Committee (EOC), has determined that it is appropriate to move to a Phase Two Plan for Reopening Bench Laboratory Research.

Starting **Monday, August 10, 2020**, the population density for research laboratories will be **increased to up to one researcher for every 250 sq ft of laboratory space** (1-250 sq ft: 1 researcher; 251-500 sq ft: 2 researchers; 501-750 sq ft: 3 researchers; 751-1000 sq ft: 4 researchers; 1001-1250 sq ft: 5 researchers; etc.).

This Phase Two Return to Research Plan is still focused on keeping a low population density in research laboratories and buildings, while still allowing the expansion of research to continue. Telecommuting should continue to occur to the maximum extent possible and in accordance with HR policy to reduce population density in research laboratories and buildings.

As the nature of COVID-19 remains dynamic, it is critical that all researchers and staff continue to follow the guidelines in the [OUHSC COVID-19 Return Plan](#) and in this Return to Research – Policy and Plan for Phase Two Reopening of Bench Laboratory Research, which includes appropriate masking, social distancing, good hygiene practices, and other steps to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the research environment. The SPPOT and the EOC, will regularly evaluate the OUHSC COVID-19 Return Plan and implement new or revised requirements when indicated. Research activities will follow any new or revised requirements put forward by these groups.

Plan Requirements - For the Phase Two Plan for Reopening of Laboratory Research all research and staff must follow the steps below:

1. Read and follow this Return to Research – Policy and Plan for Phase Two Reopening of Bench Laboratory Research
2. Follow the new population density guidelines. There is **NO** need to submit a new Research Request Worksheet if the laboratory will follow these new population density guidelines.
3. The [Standard Operating Procedures Form](#) posted on the laboratory door and inside the laboratory **MUST** be changed to reflect the new number of researchers allowed in the laboratory to fit this new population density limit.
4. If laboratory members change, the faculty researcher must submit a [Research Request Worksheet](#) with the change noted.

Core Facilities - Core Facilities will continue to operate to support current research activities; however, support will be at a reduced level. The Division of Comparative Medicine is fully functional to support animal care and use as needed. The Office of Research Administration,

the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, the Institutional Biosafety Committee, and the Institutional Review Board continue to provide services and oversight.

Masking Requirements

1. All individuals in campus facilities, including those in research laboratories, must wear, at a minimum, disposable or fabric surgical-style facemask masks that cover the nose and mouth.
2. The University will make available to researchers a surgical-style mask. Researchers may wear their own mask, including a fabric mask, so long as it complies with the [OUHSC COVID-19 Return Plan](#) and any laboratory rules and research protocols.
3. Instructions on how to obtain this surgical-style mask will be provided by the researcher's college/department/building coordinator.
4. Researchers and staff who must wear an N-95 or other specific mask in the lab may wear that in place of the surgical style mask.
5. Unless required by laboratory rules or research protocol, masks that include exfiltration valves may not be worn.

All researchers must read and be familiar with the [OUHSC COVID-19 Return Plan](#) and this Phase Two Return to Research Plan for Bench Laboratory Research.

Phase Two Reopening Directives

Population Density – Social Distancing. Each Faculty Researcher with an independent research program and each core laboratory will be allowed the equivalent of no more than one person per 250 sq ft of laboratory space; i.e., 1-250 sq ft: 1 researcher; 251-500 sq ft: 2 researchers; 501-750 sq ft: 3 researchers; 751-1000 sq ft: 4 researchers; 1001-1250 sq ft: 5 researchers; etc. The goal is to provide as much physical distancing as possible while still providing opportunity for research to continue. As described below, shifts can be scheduled to allow multiple people to work in sequence.

Faculty researchers are encouraged to keep the minimum number of individuals for the least amount of time in the laboratory and in the buildings as possible, using telecommuting as much as possible.

Many of our research laboratories are organized in neighborhoods or floors that have common equipment rooms, break areas, and entryways. Since one plan does not fit all, neighboring faculty researchers are strongly encouraged to discuss together their re-start plans to allow the best use of space and to consider plans for minimizing social interactions in common areas and hallways.

We understand that these directives do not fit all circumstances – but we ask that Faculty Researchers carefully consider the spirit of the policy and keep the health of everyone in their laboratories as their top priority. Try to resist the natural tendency to stretch the rules to squeeze in one more person: think instead about the health of that person and the health of the community.

Additional Phase Two Directives:

- For bench research laboratories that have already submitted and have an approved Research Request Worksheet there is **NO** need to submit a new Research Request Worksheet if the laboratory will follow these new population density guidelines.

- The [Standard Operating Procedures Form](#) posted on the laboratory door and inside the laboratory **must** be changed if the number of researchers allowed in the laboratory at any one time has changed with the new population density requirement.
- If laboratory members change, the faculty researcher **must** submit a [Research Request Worksheet](#) with the change noted.
- If a bench research laboratory has not yet submitted a Research Request Worksheet as part of the Phase One Reopening of Research, the Faculty Researcher must submit this worksheet prior to beginning research in the laboratory and must fill out and post the [Standard Operating Procedures Form](#) on the laboratory door and inside the laboratory.
- Faculty Researchers and laboratory members who have been absent from campus for 7 consecutive calendar days or more must complete the online COVID-19 Screening and Reporting Tool: <https://covidreporting.ouhsc.edu/> and submit it before returning to work on campus. They will be notified via email of their screening results. This return to work email is to be forwarded to the employee's direct supervisor upon receipt.
- All individuals in campus facilities, including research laboratories, must wear disposable or fabric [surgical-style facemask](#) masks; provided, however, that when individuals are in their own enclosed private workspace and are not interacting with others, they may remove their masks. Masks must also be worn in outdoor campus spaces where social distancing cannot be maintained. Scarves, bandanas, and the like are not acceptable.
- The University will make available to researchers a surgical-style mask. (Researchers who must wear N95s should obtain those through normal supply channels) Instructions on how to obtain this surgical-style mask will be provided by the researchers' college/department.
 - Disposable filtration surgical-style masks worn in non-clinical/non-surgical areas should be worn on campus for up to five consecutive days, or until soiled/broken, whichever occurs first.
 - Fabric masks should be washed and fully dried, as needed, but at least once per day. [Appropriate cleaning of the mask](#) is the responsibility of the wearer.
 - Unless required by laboratory rules or research protocols, masks with exfiltration valves may not be worn.
- Gloves and lab coats should be worn when necessitated by research being conducted; i.e., BLS-2 research. Gloves worn while in the laboratory must be removed and properly disposed before going outside of the lab for any reason. Hand washing must occur on a regular basis.
- Disinfection of research laboratory space is the responsibility of each Faculty Researcher. To reduce viral transmission during and between shifts, all labs must maintain and lab personnel must use spray disinfectant containing 70% ethanol to disinfect bench surfaces, doorknobs, light switches, and equipment surfaces frequently, plus at the beginning and end of a shift. Common equipment in shared areas should be disinfected with 70% ethanol prior to and after each use. Refer to the [OUHSC COVID-19 Return Plan](#) for complete sanitization procedures.

- Faculty Researchers who have more space than researchers to fill the space may work with their departmental chair to negotiate with neighboring labs a space sharing and shift work agreement.
- Some lab staff work in space that does not have conventional benches or research space (e.g., older labs composed of a labyrinth of small rooms). One person is permitted in the laboratory space equivalent to approximately 250 square feet. Accessory space where experiments are generally not performed (equipment rooms, etc.) does not count toward this space.
- In some cases, researchers from multiple labs in a neighborhood might use the same equipment room or cell culture space. These researchers should avoid unnecessary interactions by coordinating or rescheduling activities.
- Some lab staff spend all of their time in animal facilities, cell culture rooms, or other space away from a central lab. Those staff do not count toward the density of the central lab, but the density of staff in those locations must be minimized as well.
- Complex experiments, as well as the training of new lab members, require teamwork between at least two people. These interactions are permitted when necessary, but should be minimized whenever possible, consistent with the [OUHSC COVID-19 Return Plan](#).
- Laboratory safety must also be considered during times of low staff density. Those working with hazardous chemicals or materials are encouraged not to work alone and not to work after hours when fewer people are present. Researchers should establish a buddy system with someone in a neighboring space or lab, or use check in/check out by phone or text with the PI or another laboratory member.
- For guidance on travel, see the [OUHSC COVID-19 Return Plan](#).

Scheduling and Coordination of Work Hours. To allow multiple people to occupy sequentially the allotted space, Faculty Researchers should develop a calendar or similar system to schedule day, evening, and weekend work shifts. The structure of these schedules and the length of shifts can be flexible, depending on the type of experiment and the needs of the lab. Faculty Researchers should consider having shifts ranging from 3 to 12 hours in length. Another option is for specific people to reserve certain days of the week. Lab staff should be advised that their time in the lab is limited and they must make the most of it. Furthermore:

- Telecommuting should be encouraged as much as possible. Lab members should plan to maximize the use of their limited bench time, and they should do their notebook updating and other desktop activities when they return home.
- Lab members should communicate openly and often (by text or other messaging systems) to coordinate and adjust schedules as necessary to comply with these social distancing requirements. Everyone should leave the lab when their shift ends.

- Lab members should be encouraged to help their fellow lab members by doing minor tasks and experiments for each other that will reduce the need for others to come in to the lab.
- The Department Chair must approve any undergraduates, high school students, and other non-OU volunteers in research laboratories during Phase Two. All invited visitors to research laboratories must follow the policy in the [OUHSC COVID-19 Return Plan](#) (section XIII.B.2. Invited visitors).

Monitoring Compliance. We are confident that Faculty Researchers, trainees, and staff understand the importance of these policies and will operate accordingly and that Faculty Researchers will require their staff to do so. However, as an additional precaution, Environmental Health and Safety Office staff will be performing spot checks to identify laboratories and individuals where there is inappropriate density or lack of distancing and inappropriate protective measures. In these cases, Faculty Researchers will be required to modify staff schedules or take other measures to minimize risk of transmission. Repeat offenders could be disciplined in accordance with University policy and research-related privileges reduced or removed.

Building Access and Common Areas

- Entrances to all research buildings will continue to be restricted to key or card access or to be monitored.

Elevators - No more than four individuals may be in an elevator at one time; individuals must wear masks on elevators. Refer to the [OUHSC COVID-19 Return Plan](#) for exceptions.
- Seating Areas - Seating at tables and benches is limited to one person per 6 feet. Refer to the [OUHSC COVID-19 Return Plan](#) for exceptions.
- The University will provide increased cleaning and sanitizing of frequently used facilities and common areas, including elevators, restrooms, classrooms/lecture halls, and other high traffic spaces with the use of BPA-approved cleaners that meet CDC guidelines for disinfecting COVID-19.

Testing, Isolation, and Contact Tracing

- If an employee or student tests positive for COVID-19, the University will cooperate with the appropriate health department in its contact tracing efforts.
- Faculty Researchers who are made aware that an individual in their area has tested positive must immediately contact the Associate Dean for Research of their college. The Associate Dean for Research will follow the guidelines described in the [OUHSC COVID-19 Return Plan](#) to ensure the area is sanitized appropriately.
- All employees and students who have received a positive COVID-19 laboratory test must obtain clearance from the Student/Employee Health Clinic by submitting the online Screening and Reporting Tool <https://covidreporting.ouhsc.edu/> before returning to on-campus University responsibilities.

- Employees and students who were exposed to a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 positive individual are expected to notify the Student/Employee Health Clinic by submitting the online Screening and Reporting Tool <https://covidreporting.ouhsc.edu/> and to follow the direction provided by the Clinic and by the health department involved (if any). That direction may require certain actions, such as to remain away from University property and from on- and off-campus events until approved for return by Student/Employee Health.
- Employees and students who are experiencing symptoms (e.g., cough, loss of smell or taste, chills, headache, muscle pain, fever, shortness of breath) should contact Student/Employee Health on their campus by submitting the online Screening and Reporting Tool <https://covidreporting.ouhsc.edu/> and follow the instructions provided.
- Employees and students must submit the online Screening and Reporting Tool <https://covidreporting.ouhsc.edu/> prior to returning to campus if they travel domestically or internationally out of state, if they have a household member who has tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 14 days, and if they have attended a large event and did not wear a mask and practice social distancing. Refer to the [OUHSC COVID-19 Return Plan](#) for additional information.