

COVID Research Update Email – June 11, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

As you probably already know from the special edition of URM C This Week, the Medical Center has begun the stepwise unwinding of pandemic safeguards. Specifically, the new guidelines state that starting Monday, 6/14, **fully-vaccinated groups do not need to mask or physically distance in conference rooms and research spaces in non-clinical areas**. While this is a welcome update that points to the strides we have made in moving past the pandemic, we want to clarify several important details specific to our research endeavors:

- The new protocols do not apply to a number of spaces: clinical areas, classrooms or rooms where formal instruction is underway, shared office spaces and breakrooms, and common spaces including atriums, corridors, bathrooms, and parking garages. All employees and visitors must remain masked and socially distant in any of these areas.
- When there are meetings with people across various departments and various labs, the meeting organizer is responsible for ensuring everyone is vaccinated before allowing anyone to unmask. (If any participant chooses not to disclose his or her vaccination status, the assumption should be made that the group is not fully vaccinated, and masking/social distancing rules should remain in place.)
- ID badge stickers will be made available to all employees who qualify. While it is not a requirement for vaccinated individuals to wear it, we would encourage its adoption as a discreet way to convey this information.

What to expect next?

Next week, as mentioned in the previous communication, stickers will be issued to department administrators and graduate program coordinators for distribution to those who are fully vaccinated. They have been tasked with distributing these stickers to employees (including postdocs) and students upon verification of their vaccination via a paper vaccination record or Excelsior Pass. If you have questions about this process, please review the [FAQ](#) available on the [Redesigned intranet portal](#).

Because many of our newer research labs are open concept, there are some steps to take before determining whether a space can fully unmask. **Until full verification is completed, we ask that employees and students working in open lab areas continue to mask and socially distance while working.** Department administrators should work with their chairs to review their labs and identify individually defined spaces. Generally speaking, any contiguous space that is not separated by walls or doors would qualify as a single lab space.

Once lab areas are defined, administrators should work with PIs to identify all the current occupants of the space, and only if all the occupants can be confirmed as fully vaccinated, the defined lab area can unmask. In many areas, this may mean multiple labs will exist in the same defined space. We anticipate this verification process could take each department up to a couple of weeks to complete.

We understand that there will be many concerns as we enter this new phase, and we are planning to hold a town hall Zoom meeting with department chairs and administrators to review this information and answer any questions. We will work closely with that group to provide updates and additional

information to the research community. Thank you all for your continuing patience during this transition.

[Steve Dewhurst, PhD](#)

Vice Dean for Research