

## **COVID Research Update Email – April 7, 2021**

Dear Colleagues,

It was a little over a year ago (March 20, 2020) that New York State first issued a pause on nonessential services and gatherings, in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Twelve months later, we have somehow made it through an entire year of this pandemic – and we find ourselves at the beginning of a new spring.

The coming year promises to be very different to the last one. One of the most important priorities will be to start, gradually, reclaiming the lives and activities we have placed on hold since last March. For many, this will include coming back to work and interacting in person with friends and colleagues for the first time in over a year.

This email outlines some small, initial steps toward that goal, motivated by our concern about the negative effects of extended social isolation on many members of our community, as well as by the rapid expansion of vaccine access, and the accompanying increase in vaccination rates.

Together, we will all surely find our way toward a “new normal” over the next few months. As we do so, we would do well to remind legislators and others this would not be possible without the success of biomedical research.

To that end, [The Science Coalition](#) (a nonprofit, nonpartisan group of over 50 of the nation’s leading public and private research universities) recently released an [op-ed highlighting ongoing COVID-19 research](#) that is making an important difference to our nation. One of only three examples cited comes from the lab of Dr. Ben Miller, Dean’s Professor of Dermatology, which has “developed a sensor that can detect a patient’s exposure to multiple viruses, including COVID-19, from a single drop of blood in under a minute.”

The fact that UR is recognized as a national leader in COVID-19 research is something we can all take pride in, as we look towards better days ahead.

### **Updates:**

#### **Remote Work**

Students are no longer required to stay off campus to conduct work that can be done remotely. As long as social distancing and masking rules are followed (no protracted work closer than 6 feet to others, staying masked if others are present in the same room), work such as computational analysis, manuscript writing or other tasks that do not require lab resources can,

but do not have to, be done on site. Students can continue to work remotely if they prefer to remain off campus.

Information on returning to work for faculty, postdocs and staff will be shared by HR in the coming weeks.

### **Group Meetings**

Smaller groups such as thesis committees, or a group of lab members can physically meet in suitable seminar rooms, respecting the posted maximal occupancy number and adhering to the same masking and distancing rules mentioned above. **Participation in such meetings has to be voluntary and options for joining remotely have to be available.**

### **One-on-One Meetings**

One-on-one in-person meetings, e.g. between trainees and mentors, are allowed as long as both are masked and separated by 6 feet. **Participation in such meetings has to be voluntary.**

### **Rules for Vaccinated Personnel**

Groups of people sharing closed rooms still need to be masked and observe social distancing even if all members are fully vaccinated.

### **Support Services/Resources**

If you are feeling stressed, anxious or overwhelmed in these COVID times, there are a number of resources for students and employees:

- Students can reach out to the [University Counseling Center](#) and check out [COVID Coping and Resources](#), a site run by University Health Service.
- Employees can contact the [UR Medicine Employee Assistance Program](#), one of several [support services for faculty, postdocs and staff](#).
- If you see someone else who is really struggling, contact the [CARE Network](#). A member of the CARE staff will then reach out to this person and offer them a supportive conversation. Anyone can [submit a referral](#).
- The CDC outlines [Considerations for Returning to Work](#) and there are many articles that address concerns about returning to work, including this Forbes piece – [Return To Work Anxiety? You're Not Alone](#).

### **Fun Extras!**

#### **Making COVID More Comfortable: U.S. Gov. Launches Mask Design Contest for \$500,000**

If you're sick of foggy glasses, skin outbreaks, and muffled speech, you're not alone. While masks are essential in keeping us safe during the pandemic (and future pandemics), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recognizes that they can be a hassle. That's why the government has launched the [Mask Innovation Challenge](#). Up to five designs will be chosen that improve mask designs for everyday wear. If you want to participate – and potentially win \$500,000 – submit your idea by April 21 at 5 p.m. EST.

**Encourage others to vaccinate!**

Two vaccine graphics are available to add to your email signature. Simply visit the [Brand Center](#) > URM Templates > Vaccine Email Signature to download.

**Finally, please be sure to check out the following newsletters for useful information:**

- [URMC This Week](#) (comes out every Wednesday)
- [faculty@urmc](#) (comes out Tuesday/Thursday)
- [@Rochester](#) (daily)
- You can browse and subscribe to other URM newsletters on the [Newsletters@URMC](#) intranet page.

Thank you for your cooperation and resilience. As always, if you have any concerns about safety compliance or other issues related to work, please email [research\\_covid\\_concerns@urmc.rochester.edu](mailto:research_covid_concerns@urmc.rochester.edu).

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Vice Dean for Research