March 16, 2020

Dear colleagues

I’m writing with an update, and some guidance, in terms of laboratory-based research activities at the med center.

This applies to all members of our lab-based research community (faculty, postdoc, staff and students).

First, and foremost, we need to implement and observe social distancing, in order to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Second, we need to plan for the inevitable: that members of our research community will become infected with the virus, or will need to be quarantined.

The practical implications of this include the following:

- **Develop a phone tree.** Make sure that everyone in your lab can contact each other in an emergency.
- **Reconsider your experiments.** Every lab (and every individual researcher) should carefully consider the experiments that they have in progress, or planned. How might they be impacted if members of your lab (or yourself) were out sick, or needed to be quarantined for 2 weeks? What would happen if your lab was temporarily inaccessible, because it was being decontaminated? Now is not the time to start a large, long-term experiment. And if you have such an experiment in progress, please think carefully about how you might cryopreserve what you have, or stop it early if you had to.
- **Think about your animals.** Long-term animal studies might be jeopardized if the supply chain were significantly disrupted by COVID-19. Do you have mouse lines that took years to establish, or are unique in some way? Consider how you might cryopreserve embryos, or try to protect a small group of young, “founder” animals from which a colony might, if necessary, be rapidly re-established. We are presently in discussion with the vivarium and UCAR management to develop advice for cryopreservation. Finally, it would be valuable to reduce animal populations to the extent possible.
- **Do some cross-training.** Who knows how to change the LN2 tank? Who places the orders for your lab? Who could feed your cells if you were out? A little backup would be wise.
- **Develop a flexible shift schedule for your lab (and yourself).** Social distancing is easier if the whole lab doesn’t come to work at the same time. Also, school and daycare closings will create unanticipated childcare responsibilities - which will in turn require more flexible work schedules for those affected (including the ability to work from home, when feasible). We’re working with HR to facilitate this for staff members, so please talk to your PI/supervisor and let them know your situation. In creating a lab shift schedule, please also remember: (1) to clean and disinfect lab surfaces between shifts (see footnote); and (2) that its not safe to work alone, if you work with dangerous pathogens or hazardous equipment.
- **Work from home when feasible.** If you do not need to be in the building and it is approved by your supervisor/mentor, please work from home. Consider only coming in for the minimum amount of time required to maintain critical experiments or animal colonies. As noted above, we are working with HR to facilitate this for staff members, when feasible, and hope to have updated information shortly. For now, please discuss this with your supervisor/mentor (and if you are a PI/supervisor, please discuss this with your department/unit chair and administrator).
• **Don’t congregate in public spaces.** Try to eat lunch at an off-peak time, so that you’re not in the break room with a large group of other people.

• **Be prepared for all eventualities.** Many of you may be aware of [Harvard’s decisions to shut down its research labs](https://harvardnews.harvard.edu/stories/2020/03/coronavirus-shuts-down-harvard-research-labs). We are actively monitoring the situation - and recommend that everyone be prepared, should the situation evolve in that direction.

• **Review guidance for researchers** on [URMC COVID-19 website](https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/). This will serve as a repository for the most up-to-date information for the research community.

We will provide updated guidance and advice on at least a weekly basis, and more frequently if needed.

Some final thoughts:

This might be a good time to **develop a “buddy” system** within your lab/program/unit/department. Make sure that your departments/centers/labs have up to date contact and emergency contact information for all members: faculty, students, postdocs and staff. People who live alone, or who need special accommodations, may need help in this time of crisis. **We should be there for each other.**

Please also start to **think about how you might most productively use your time**, if you had to stay at home for an extended period. Is now a good time to work on grants or manuscripts? To develop online journal clubs? To organize online groups to learn R? To learn new skills that you never had the time for?

Yours

Steve Dewhurst

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Footnote:


Two of the disinfectants commonly approved by the University’s Institutional Biosafety Committee for surface disinfection are on this list: Clorox bleach and Virex II 256.

For cleaning iPads and other surfaces, Infection Prevention is recommending another product on the list: Clorox Healthcare Hydrogen Peroxide wipes.

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