Guide to COVID-19 Infection Response in Research Labs, Studios and Creative Spaces

July 20, 2020

This document will provide guidance for department heads and lab directors concerning the necessary steps for responding to a case of COVID-19 infection or suspected infection, or a person is a primary contact among students, faculty or staff working in research labs, studios and other creative spaces. This document builds on the more general campus guidance for when a case of COVID-19 is reported.

Definitions:

**Confirmed Case (COVID-19 Source):** Someone is confirmed to have COVID-19 through Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) certified testing. This event triggers contact tracing, and close contacts of the person will be identified.

**Probable Case (COVID-19 Source):** Someone is symptomatic and awaiting CLIA certified test results.

**Primary Contact of a Case:** Anyone who was within 6 feet of someone with a confirmed or probable COVID-19 infection for at least 10 minutes starting from 48 hours before the person began feeling sick until the time the patient was isolated.

**Close Contact of a Primary Contact (Secondary):** Close contacts of a primary contact do not need to isolate or get tested. However, if the primary contact develops symptoms or tests positive, then secondary contacts become primary contacts and need to isolate and be tested.

**Employees and students should self-isolate** and complete a self-isolation form if they:

- Have tested positive for COVID-19
- Develop symptoms of a COVID-19 infection
- Are awaiting COVID-19 test results
- Have had close contact with someone known to be diagnosed with COVID-19
- Have recently returned to the US after traveling abroad
- Have recently returned from a cruise (ocean or river)

It is critically important for a person who is a confirmed case, probable case, or primary contact to complete the self-isolation form. This form triggers contact tracing and alerts Facilities Services that one or more rooms may need to be sanitized.

**When someone from a research lab self-isolates,** mandatory shut-down and sanitation of the affected space may need to occur. Facilities Services monitors self-isolation reports and will communicate with directors of affected space to discuss temporary closure requirements, coordination of enhanced cleaning and disinfecting, and considerations such as sensitive equipment. The lab will only be closed for a day or longer depending on the nature of the sanitizing that is needed, if a positive case is involved in the situation. Although Facilities Services will try to make sure all sanitation is conducted in a manner to protect all sensitive equipment, it is the responsibility of the lab director to provide necessary information to safely shut down the lab and protect such equipment before sanitation is initiated.

**Voluntary Laboratory Closure:** As testing results may take several days and asymptomatic carriers exist, the lab director may choose to hibernate the lab until results are known.
Note that for either a required or voluntary laboratory closure, it should be performed in a manner that creates a safe space during the closure and for re-opening utilizing the Checklist for Achieving Safe Voluntary Hibernations or Required Shutdowns for Research Laboratories.

For updates on university guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic, please visit UT’s Coronavirus website regularly. Specific information regarding COVID-19 impacts on campus research activity is located at research.utk.edu/covid-19/. Note that research labs, studios, and other open access rooms are considered common areas, and, following university policy, masks should be worn at all times in labs when more than one person is in the lab.