

MBL 2021 Guidelines for Non-Resident Research

Overview

This document outlines requirements for occupying research space at the Marine Biological Laboratory. The MBL and the Woods Hole community are not “back to normal.” These guidelines reflect the past year of experience conducting research at the MBL and the growing understanding of best practices for mitigating the risk of spreading of SARS-CoV-2 in environments where proper hygiene, social distancing, and mask wearing protocols are strictly followed. The primary focus of these guidelines is on minimizing potential COVID-related risk to the MBL community and violations will not be tolerated. These guidelines necessitate reduced research operations and reduced collaborative interaction. There may be experiments that cannot be conducted under these guidelines. Whitman Investigators must recognize that many aspects of the usual MBL summer will not be possible and should adjust plans accordingly.

The MBL continues to follow the “Sector Specific Workplace Safety Standards for Laboratories to Address COVID-19” issued by the state March 22, 2021. Changes in local or state regulations may affect these guidelines with little or no advance warning, and Whitman Investigators will need to adapt their plans accordingly.

Anyone accessing the MBL campus is required to complete the [COVID-19 online training course and training attestation acknowledging that they will comply with the MBL’s COVID-19 Health Requirements](#).

Anyone can report violations to the MBL’s COVID-19 Health Requirements by reporting the incident to their supervisor, PI, or MBL Point of Contact or by submitting an anonymous [COVID-19 Incident Violation Report](#).

General Guidelines

- 1) Vaccination status, prior positive testing, or prior diagnosis of COVID-19 of any individual has no bearing to any requirements in this policy.
- 2) Research space should be used for active research only. Work that can be done remotely should be done remotely (data analysis, etc).
- 3) Meetings should take place in outdoor space or virtually. Designated break rooms should not be used for meetings.
- 4) Maintain social distancing in building hallways, entryways, and stairwells to the extent possible and do not congregate for conversation.
- 5) All buildings on the MBL campus are locked at all times and access is limited to pre-authorized users. Note that this includes access to the Central Microscopy Facility and the Marine Resources Center.
- 6) Each Whitman Scientist or Fellow not embedded in a resident lab must submit a Research Plan that addresses safety and physical distancing, and commits the Whitman Investigator to monitor, evaluate and govern safe behaviors in their lab space. Research Plans will be evaluated by the Director of Research for final approval by the Director of the MBL.
- 7) All Whitman Investigators must be named on an approved Whitman or Resident Research Plan.
- 8) No activities may occur in research space prior to the Director’s approval of the Whitman Investigator’s Research Plan.

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- 9) All Whitman Investigators and their personnel must have completed both the MBL COVID Safety Training and the Chemical and Fire Safety Training prior to commencing research activities.
- 10) No visitors or minors, including family members, are permitted in research areas at any time.
- 11) Investigators must follow the [Guidance for Inviting Vendors or Contractors to MBL Campus](#) if they invite vendors or technicians to install or service equipment. Compliance by vendors with MBL COVID policies is the responsibility of the host investigator.
- 12) All labs must have appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and disinfectant solutions in place prior to commencing research activities. PPE, ethanol, isopropanol, and wipes can be purchased in the MBL Stockroom.
- 13) Universal masking, physical distance measures, safety training, frequent hand washing, and disinfecting of surfaces are critical to maintaining a safe working environment.
- 14) It is essential that anyone displaying any symptoms of COVID-19 should not be on the MBL campus. An individual's presence on campus is an attestation that they are asymptomatic. If Principal Investigators who have lab members displaying symptoms or have been contacted about someone displaying symptoms should contact the Human Resources Department at hr@mbledu. **It is important to note that no identifying information should be submitted in writing.** More information can be found in the MBL's Guide for Addressing Confirmed or Suspected COVID-19 Exposures.
- 15) Anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 should follow the protocols outlined in the [Guide for Addressing Confirmed or Suspected COVID-19 Exposures](#).
- 16) Research areas will be monitored by MBL Safety Representatives. Failure to adhere to these guidelines, MBL COVID policies, and to relevant Research Plans will result in termination of access to campus or closing of labs with forfeiture of rental fees or fellowships.
- 17) The MBL will administer a COVID-19 Testing Program for all visiting registered researchers living in MBL housing. More details on the [MBL Testing and Contact Tracing Program](#) are online. The MBL has reserved isolation housing if needed. More information on isolation can be found online.

Registering as Whitman Investigator

All buildings on the MBL campus are locked and require an active MBL ID card for entry. All MBL ID cards are inactive until the bearer completes the MBL COVID Safety Training. The process for this training for Whitman Investigators is described below.

- 1) All Whitman Scientists and Fellows not embedded in a resident lab must submit a Whitman Phase 2 Research Plan.
- 2) All Whitman registrants must be listed on a Whitman or Resident Phase 2 Research Plan.
- 3) All Whitman registrants are responsible for downloading and reading the documents available at the application site:
 - a) MBL COVID-19 Workplace Safety Policy
 - b) Guidance for Using Masks in MBL Work Areas
 - c) MBL Mandatory Daily Health Screening Form
 - d) MBL COVID-19 Acknowledgement Attestation
 - e) MBL Phase 2 Research Guidelines for Whitman Investigators (this document)

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- 4) Each registrant will be sent a link to the online MBL COVID Safety Training, which they must complete, including the MBL COVID-19 Acknowledgement Attestation at the end of the training. MBL ID cards will generally be activated within 24 hours of completing the training.

Social Distancing Considerations for Research Space

Social distancing is a combination of distance, activity, direction, and time. The MBL follows the CDC and state definition of close contact, which is currently within 6 feet for a total of 15 minutes cumulative over a 24-hour period. This definition is subject to change on short notice.

Transient use of space is a low exposure risk given that all individuals are wearing masks, however individuals should walk with purpose through shared areas or when passing another person's work space, without loitering or engaging in conversation. Research Plans should avoid multiple individuals using shared space simultaneously in a way that would constitute close contact. Shared equipment should be located at least 6' from individual work areas and from other equipment likely to be used at the same time by others. Physical or online sign-up sheets should be used when needed.

- 1) Research requiring individuals to work in conditions that will result in close contact (e.g., working together at microscopes, injection rigs, dissections) must include face shields and may require additional PPE. Current best practices guidance is for both individuals in close contact to use face masks and face shields. In situations where face shield will be an interference (microscope work) then both individuals should use double masks. Whitman Investigators must justify the need for close contact in their Research Plan and describe risk mitigation measures. If close contact is required after a Research Plan has been approved an amendment must be approved by the Director of Research and the Manager of Environmental Health and Safety. Note that any close contact with an individual who tests positive will result in mandatory quarantine regardless of PPE employed.
- 2) In multiple user labs, each individual will be assigned a work zone with at least 6 feet of distance from any other person.
 - a) Work zones should be arranged so that individuals are facing walls or other barriers, or otherwise away from other individuals, or the same direction whenever possible. If room design requires individuals to be facing each other they should be staggered whenever possible. No work zones should have individuals facing each at the 6 foot limit.
 - b) There must be enough space between work zones to accommodate reasonable movement of individuals while avoiding close contact, given the occupancy and layout of the lab space.
 - c) If asynchronous shifts are necessary to ensure social distancing:
 - i) Work plans must include a thorough disinfecting of work zones before and after each shift.
 - ii) Night shifts should not be assigned to personnel who do not regularly work in the evening/night.
- 3) Shared space within a multiple-user lab or general use room (e.g., reagent prep areas; centrifuge; gel doc station)
 - a) Common use equipment should be spread out and where practical moved to under-used rooms to maximize distance.
 - b) A distance of 6' must be maintained between individuals, and individuals should occupy shared space for the minimal time practical.
 - c) Common use equipment should be disinfected before and after use, with physical or online sign-up sheets used when needed.

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- d) Wash hands after use of shared equipment; if wearing gloves dispose of gloves, wash hands, then put on fresh gloves.
- 4) Small rooms sequentially used by multiple individuals (e.g., microscope rooms, other rooms with special equipment)
 - a) Use must be coordinated in PI work plans.
 - b) Wash hands after use of shared equipment; if wearing gloves dispose of gloves and wash hands.
 - c) Disinfect all surfaces before and after occupancy.
 - d) Disinfect hands when leaving the room and wash hands as soon as possible.
 - e) Masks must be worn at all times.

Designation of Research Space

- 1) Research space is designated for single (named) individuals, for multiple (named) individuals, or general use.
- 2) Every room will have a single named Investigator responsible for training and compliance of all personnel who use the room.
- 3) Designation of responsibility for multiple-user rooms shared by multiple Investigators, and general use rooms will be assigned by the Director of Research.
- 4) Every room will be clearly labeled as single-user, multiple-user, or general use.
 - a) Rooms designated for single (named) individuals.
 - i) Offices, laboratory rooms dedicated to one named individual.
 - ii) Must be clearly labeled.
 - iii) Only one named individual, or named individuals who live together, can occupy the space.
 - iv) Masks need not be worn while in the room.
 - v) Doors must remain shut while the room is occupied.
 - b) Rooms designated as multiple user space.
 - i) Rooms where designated space is used by designated individuals (i.e. lab benches). Note that due to distancing requirements there may be multiple-user rooms that are only used by one individual at a time. These differ from single-user rooms.
 - ii) Maximum occupancy to be determined by social distancing considerations and specific space configuration (see below).
 - iii) Masks must be worn at all times, regardless of time of day or current occupancy. Disposable surgical masks should be worn when hazardous materials are being used in the lab.
 - iv) No portable or personal fans or air-moving devices in multiple user rooms.
 - c) Rooms designated as general use.
 - i) Rooms where the same space is used by different individuals over time (i.e. microscope rooms, dedicated equipment rooms).
 - ii) Maximum occupancy to be determined by social distancing considerations and specific space configuration.
 - iii) Masks must be worn at all times, regardless of time of day or current occupancy. Disposable surgical masks should be worn when hazardous materials are being used in the lab.
 - iv) No portable or personal fans or air-moving devices in general use rooms designated to be occupied by more than one person.

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- 5) Research spaces will be cleaned by research staff. All rooms will have cleaning logs in compliance with state regulations. Maintenance of active logs and of completed (full) log sheets is the responsibility of the PI to whom the room is assigned.
- 6) Trash bins should be left outside of rooms or in the immediate vicinity of the entrance for emptying by EVS.

2021 Whitman Research Plans

- 1) Whitman Scientists and Fellows not embedded in a resident lab will submit a Research Plan including:
 - a) All staff occupying research space (all individuals must be registered).
 - b) Designation of their designated space(s) as single, multiple, or general use.
 - c) Physical distancing plan for each space based on social distancing criteria described above.
 - d) Scheduling plan for each space, if applicable.
 - e) Cleaning/disinfecting plan for each space
 - i) Cleaning and disinfectant solutions should be thoughtfully positioned so that lab personnel may clean upon entering and exiting the lab; all high touch shared equipment, freezers, warm and cold rooms, etc., should have nearby wipes and disinfectants.
 - ii) Cleaning logs must be maintained for each room.
 - iii) Appropriate cleaning protocols for microscopes and other sensitive equipment is available from the Central Microscopy Facility (CMF).
 - f) Description of conditions that will require close contact, and mitigation measures.
 - g) Ramp-down plan for whole laboratory.
 - h) Need for hazardous waste disposal.
 - i) Need for use of space assigned to other investigators and coordination plan.
 - j) Coordination plan for other investigators using your space.
 - k) Need for access to CMF, Animal Care Facility, or Marine Resources Center.
- 2) Directors of Centers and Services have worked with MBL faculty to establish policies for shared lunchrooms, conference rooms, and meeting rooms. These policies include signage outside the room indicating maximum occupancy or specific individuals designated to use the room, cleaning procedures, and use of cleaning logs. Whitman Investigators must get approval from Center/Service Directors before using these rooms.
- 3) Directors of Centers and Services have worked with the Manager of Environmental Health and Safety to designate Safety Representatives for each research building. Safety Representatives, Center Directors, or the Manager of EH&S perform inspections of each research space to monitor for appropriate density, PPE usage, physical distancing, and complete cleaning logs. Safety Representatives and Directors meet with the Director of Research and Manager of EH&S to review compliance, identify potential safety issues, and recommend updated guidance when necessary. The Director of Research and Manager of EH&S assess overall compliance and complaints with the MBL COVID Safety team and MBL Director to make adjustments to these plans as needed.
- 4) Research Plans will be submitted to the office of the Director of Research (research@mbi.edu) for evaluation by the Director of Research and approval by the Director of the MBL.