

## MBL Guidelines for Phase 2 Research

### Overview

This document outlines requirements for Phase 2 research at the Marine Biological Laboratory. This phase is 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 MBL will continue reduced research operations with a primary focus on minimizing potential COVID-related risk to the MBL community. There may be experiments that cannot be conducted under phase 2 conditions. Principal Investigators (PIs) must continue to recognize that research will happen more slowly than normal, and that some projects may need to be further postponed. PIs should continue to adjust plans in light of reduced and less efficient laboratory time.

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 PIs will need to adapt their research plans accordingly.

### Key Changes from Phase 1

- Required social distancing is based on maintaining 6’ of separation.
- Close contact is allowed under pre-approved circumstances.
- Room use logs are no longer required (cleaning logs are still required).
- Individuals not designated for a multiple user room may enter the room to use shared equipment but may not enter designated work zones.
- “Shared Use” rooms are now referred to as “General Use” and are not restricted to named individuals.

Anyone accessing the MBL campus are 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) All work that can be done remotely should continue to be done remotely. Meetings should continue to take place via Zoom, phone, Microsoft Teams, etc., even in cases where all participants are on the MBL campus and available to meet in person. In-person meetings must be approved by the Director of Research.
- 3) All contractors and vendors must register at <https://goforward.mbl.edu/visitors-to-the-mbl-campus/>. Compliance by visitors with MBL COVID guidelines is the responsibility of the host PI. The MBL is currently not allowing unregistered visitors on campus.
- 4) No secondary school or undergraduate students are permitted in research areas without prior approval from the Director of Research.

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- 5) Each PI must maintain their current Phase 1 Research Resumption Plan or have an approved Phase 2 Research Plan. Phase 2 Research Plans address safety and physical distancing, and commit PIs to monitor, evaluate and govern safe behaviors in the lab.
- 6) Center Directors must evaluate and approve each plan including a final walk through of the PIs research space. Plans will then be evaluated by the Director of Research for final approval by the Director of the MBL. No Phase 2 activities may occur prior to the Director's approval of the PIs Phase 2 Research Plan.
- 7) All labs must maintain appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and disinfectant solutions during Phase 2.
- 8) Any personnel who have not completed the MBL COVID Safety Training and Attestation as part of Phase 1 activities must do so prior to returning to campus.
- 9) No one should be pressured to work on campus if they are uncomfortable doing so, and retaliatory action taken against anyone who prefers not to return to work on campus due to concerns about infection will not be tolerated. Any concerns should be reported to Human Resources.
- 10) Universal mask use, physical distance measures, safety training, frequent hand washing, and disinfecting of surfaces remain a critical part of maintaining a safe working environment.
- 11) 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](mailto: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.
- 12) Anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 should follow the protocols outlined in the [Guide for Addressing Confirmed or Suspected COVID-19 Exposures](#).
- 13) Research areas will be monitored by designated Safety Representatives. Failure to adhere to the MBL COVID policies and to relevant Research Plans can result in termination of access to campus or closing of labs.
- 14) 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.

### 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 based on state and federal guidelines.

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

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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) Phase 2 research requiring individuals to work in conditions that will result in close contact (e.g., working together at microscopes, injection rigs, dissections) should 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. PIs 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-utilized 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.
  - 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 then 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) Spaces that are part of the Division of Research will be designated for single (named) individuals, for multiple (named) individuals, general use, or closed.

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- 2) Every room will have a single named Principal Investigator responsible for training and compliance of personnel who use the room.
- 3) Designation of responsibility for multiple-user rooms shared by multiple PIs, and general use rooms, should be agreed upon by Principal Investigators and will be approved by the Center Director or Director of Research.
- 4) Every room will be clearly labeled as single-user, multiple-user, general use, or closed.
  - a) Rooms designated as single-user.
    - 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 ("shared use rooms" in Phase 1).
    - 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.
  - d) Rooms designated as closed should not be used.
- 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/recycle bins should be left outside of rooms or in the immediate vicinity of the entrance for emptying by the Environmental Services (EVS) Department. EVS will schedule floor cleaning during a time when research space is unoccupied.

### Phase 2 Research Plans

- 1) PIs will submit a plan for Phase 2 research including:
  - a) All staff involved in Phase 2 research.
  - b) Designation of each room as single, multiple, general use, or closed.
  - c) Physical distancing plan for each room based on social distancing criteria described above. The use of sketches of floor plans is encouraged.
  - d) Scheduling plan for each room, if applicable.

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- e) Cleaning/disinfecting plan for each room
    - 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 PIs and coordination plan.
  - j) Coordination plan for other PIs using your space.
  - k) Need for access to the Marine Resources Center (MRC).
- 2) The Director of Imaging Services will submit a Research Plan for the CMF.
  - 3) The Director of the Marine Research Services will submit a Research Plan for the common use areas of the MRC and the Animal Care Facility.
  - 4) The Director of the Ecosystems Center will submit a Research Plan for the Plum Island Estuary Long Term Ecological Research Station.
  - 5) Directors of Centers and Services will work with PIs to establish policies for shared breakrooms, conference rooms and meeting rooms. Policies must include signage outside the room indicating maximum occupancy or specific individuals designated to use the room, cleaning procedures, and use of cleaning and room use logs. Minimum distance between individuals when eating or resting without masks in breakrooms is 8' and individuals must not be facing each other.
  - 6) Safety Representatives designated by Directors of Centers and Services and the Manager of EH&S monitor research areas for proper PPE usage, physical distancing, and maintenance of cleaning logs. Safety Representatives and Directors meet biweekly with the Director of Research and the Manager of EH&S to review compliance, identify potential safety issues, and recommend updated guidance when necessary. The Director of Research and the Manager of EH&S will assess overall compliance and complaints with the MBL COVID Safety team and the MBL Director to make adjustments to these guidelines and plans as needed.
  - 7) Phase 2 Research Plans will be submitted to the Center Director or Director of Research for evaluation with final approval by the Director of the MBL.