

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Department of Biology, MSC 3AF
New Mexico State University
P.O. Box 30001
Las Cruces, NM 88003-8001

Telephone: (575) 646-3611
Fax: (575) 646-5665



TO: Enrico Pontelli, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

FROM: Michele K. Nishiguchi, Dept. Head and Regents Professor, Biology

RE: Plan for Phase II for research faculty, students and staff to return to campus

DATE: 5/20/2020

This memo is in regard to the Department of Biology's plan to return to campus. We have devised a general set of protocols that everyone in the Department has to follow in order to allow for a safe environment in Foster Hall and the Biology Annex. All faculty, staff, and students who are approved to return to work will be required to sign a general Departmental safety plan to acknowledge their understanding of the protocols set forth, as well as any additional requirements for their specific laboratories/offices. Additionally, personnel will be responsible for keeping up to date with the latest information from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) website (Symptoms- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html> and workplace safety: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>). The following lists the general information required by the President's mandate for a safe workplace.

1) Scope of work for Unit:

The purposes of the NMSU Department of Biology are coincident with those of the University, in that our responsibilities fall into the general areas of teaching, research, and professional service. The first two are considered to be synergistic and of equal importance; graduate and undergraduate instruction is enriched by faculty and student involvement in research. The third area, professional service, enhances the function of the department, the university and the discipline. In addition to these primary responsibilities, we see leadership as an important element of our activities and, when applicable, extension and outreach as contributing positively to our mission.

2) Functions that must take place on campus to support our mission as well as those that can successfully support our mission through telework:

The Department of Biology's research mission requires that faculty, staff, and students (both graduate and undergraduate) who conduct research through laboratory or field-based experimentation have access to resources, laboratory space, and equipment located either in Foster Hall or in the Biology Annex. Those personnel must be able to enter either Foster Hall or the Biology Annex and work in their respective research spaces. Staff that are necessary to support the mission of the Department (e.g., building manager, laboratory assistant) will also be allowed to return to assist the ongoing research and teaching responsibilities in the Department. Those personnel will be required to follow proper safety protocols as set by the CDC, NMSU Environmental Health and Safety, as well as the Department and within each specific laboratory unit within Biology.

Personnel that are not involved in research projects that require immediate or ongoing data collection or can complete their responsibilities from home (e.g., teaching/prepping online courses, data analysis, fiscal monitoring, book keeping, hiring personnel, payroll) will not be required to be on campus and can continue to work from home via telework. Those personnel that are able to complete their work from home (office administrative assistant, fiscal assistant, laboratory manager, faculty advisor) may elect to continue to work from home, or choose to have a part time schedule between on campus and telework. Additionally, those faculty that do not conduct research on campus (solely teaching or do not have current research projects that are ongoing) may also choose to continue teleworking from home to reduce contact and exposure. These personnel will notify their immediate supervisor who will continue to monitor their presence if they need to come onto campus periodically.

3) A description of the locations for these functions:

The Department of Biology has a main office that houses three office staff (Departmental Administrative Assistant, Fiscal Assistant, and the receptionist (work study student)). We plan to have either a part time schedule between our staff, as well as install protective barriers and have daily cleaning of office equipment (xerox machine). Additionally, the Department Head has a separate office within the main office, but this space is only occupied by the Department Head and no other person, so no additional barriers are needed at this time since all meetings with the Department Head will be held virtually.

The Biology stockroom has two full-time staff persons as well as one work study student and one part time IT person, where each of the full-time staff have their own offices (so they are not sharing the same space). We plan to have a protective barrier for the reception/receiving desk to protect any of the staff or students working in the stockroom who come into contact with other people in the building receiving their packages or obtaining supplies from the stockroom. Our

part time IT person only works approximately 4 hrs/week, and has his own office where no one else works.

Research laboratories (BSL1 and BSL2) will be required to maintain the specific safety protocols as outlined below, as well as follow additional safety procedures as deemed necessary by each individual PI/faculty that will be approved by the Department Head, the Dean of the College, and the VPR. Personnel working within the Biology greenhouses will also be required to follow proper safety protocols when entering those areas, and supervisors who have experiments that are ongoing in these areas will be required to have documentation of personnel entering those spaces each time they are being used.

4) A plan for how to decide who will work from campus and who teleworks:

The Department of Biology will assess who is required to be on campus to support the research and teaching endeavors of the unit, as well as those personnel who do not feel comfortable returning to campus but can still telework from home. We plan to adjust schedules so that the required social distance is maintained between personnel working in the same unit/laboratory that do not have their own office space to maintain adequate distance.

5 and 6) Assessment of COVID-19 exposure risks and mitigation plans for each of the risk points, including safety practices such as workplace or schedule modifications, installation of barriers, personal protective equipment, limiting public access, training in daily cleaning and disinfection protocols:

Work will be conducted in a low-density environment, with at least 50 sq feet allotted per person (equivalent to 8 feet of social distance, or one person per typical research bench). When training or safe supervision require closer distances, faculty, staff and students should pay special attention to PPE and consider additional controls like safety glasses, barriers, or face shields to minimize the possibility of infection.

All faculty, staff, and students will wear PPE equivalent to BSL2 conditions (gloves, lab coats, no eating or drinking) plus personal facemasks (fabric or equivalent) while working in their laboratories. Facemasks will be required in all public spaces (hallways, main office, bathrooms) while working in Foster Hall or the Biology Annex. The only allowed time a face mask can be removed is if the personnel are in their own office space that is not shared with another person.

Work time in the lab will be logged using sign-in sheets or electronic means to enable contact tracing. Personnel should also be prepared to provide lists of recent contacts and locations visited outside of the lab for contact tracing in case an infection is suspected. Each person can keep their own personal log (recording every place they visited in the building and at what time) which will only be used (voluntarily) in the case of a positive COVID case. The Department

will have sign in sheets posted on every public space (autoclave rooms, ultra-cold freezer rooms, ice machine common rooms, restrooms, *etc.*) and personnel will need to sign in each time they enter/exit those spaces.

Personnel will spend the minimum amount of time necessary in the lab to conduct their procedures, and confine their activities to necessary workspaces (and bathrooms).

Personnel will clean and disinfect their lab stations, offices, and any personal space before and after use. The general lab environment will be cleaned regularly. Personnel will be required to hand wash and sanitize any areas that have been used.

Personnel will take and record their own temperature daily **before** coming to work. If they are running a temperature or show other symptoms of COVID. infection they must not return to work and will contact the Aggie Health and Wellness center or their personal doctor for consultation.

Any confirmed suspect COVID cases will socially isolated until they have been tested; any confirmed COVID cases will move immediately into social isolation for 2 weeks and will be asked to provide any necessary information for contact tracing on a voluntary basis.

All faculty, staff, and students will keep themselves up to date on CDC symptoms and safety guidelines via the CDC websites:

Symptoms: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

Workplace safety: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>

Faculty, staff, and students will promptly complete any NMSU training pertaining to COVID safety when made available.

Field-based research will follow the same principles of social distancing, proper PPE, health monitoring and cleanliness.

Lab-specific Safety Plan: Different labs and research projects may present unique conditions that impact safety. Each PI/faculty person will detail the specifics of their laboratory procedures for safety (along with this plan), and submit it to the Department Head for approval.

Departmental specifics:

All faculty meetings will be online and will be in this format until the restrictions on crowd sizes are lifted.

Student recruitment and retention efforts will follow NMSU guidelines. Since this is the summer period, we do not anticipate that many students will be in the department. However, routine gathering of student clubs and organizations will be limited until there are clear guidelines from NMSU on the number of students that can assemble.

Departmental personnel will be encouraged to limit travel to areas with active COVID-19 cases. Travel approval (personal or work related) must go through the Department Head, College Dean, and the VPR.

All communal spaces (conference rooms, break rooms, *etc.*) will be closed temporarily until we can return to safely meeting in those areas.

All departmental vehicles must be sanitized after use and the default occupancy is one person per vehicle.

When it is not feasible to have one person per vehicle, the use of departmental passenger vehicle under this circumstance will be allowed only after the potential user has an approved plan for vehicle use from the department head. These plans will include, but not limited to, appropriate social distancing, the use of PPE, and having open windows when passengers are on board. Students in labs requiring travel may prefer to use their own vehicles and would be allowed and encouraged to do so. Researchers are encouraged to use their own vehicles and follow the departmental policy for travel reimbursement.

7. Plan for the likelihood of an employee who was exposed to COVID-19.

The Department of Biology requires that personnel self-report to their immediate supervisor, who then reports to the Department Head in the case of a positive exposure. The location, log of the person who was infected (for contact tracing), and other information will be used in order to evacuate those areas in order for OFS to come and do a complete deep cleaning. Personnel that work in those areas will be asked to stay away from that area/floor of the building until all areas where the infected person was has been cleaned. If several floors were utilized by the infected person, then the entire building will be closed until OFS can sanitize the entire building.

An employee (student, staff, faculty) will immediately notify supervisor or instructor and the Aggie Health and Wellness or their personal doctor by email or telephone if they suspect they are ill (see CDC website - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>), or if they are notified that they may have potentially been exposed to COVID-19. Once the supervisor or instructor discovers via email that a person may have a virus or has been tested as presumptively positive, the supervisor or instructor will work with the employee promptly via email or telephone to assert that they are isolated and do not transmit further, and then contact specifically trained

personnel in the NM Department of Health for contact tracing. The supervisor/instructor will maintain email and telephone records of affected employees and their contacts. The names and contact information (telephone and email) of the affected employees and their recent contact(s) will be reported to the Department Head. The affected student/employee will be instructed to call their physician, the New Mexico Department of Health COVID Hotline, or the Aggie Health and Wellness Center to arrange for a test, if the student/employee has not already done so. In extreme cases, they will be instructed to call 911. The affected student/employee will return to class/work only if they have been tested, and only after a negative test. If the test is positive, the supervisor/student will notify the Department Head, and the student/employee will self-quarantine for 14 days.

8. Continuation of business if a triggering event occurs:

The Department will continue to work if the infected person's area of work was isolated within a contained area. If the infected person had contact with more than one area/floor, then the entire building will be closed and work will continue from home until the unit can be sanitized.

Appendix A.

NMSU Employee Expectations

All employees are expected to follow the following workplace standards and behaviors regardless of job title, position, or work location.

1. Stay home if you are sick
2. Report to your supervisor if you have had direct personal contact with a person testing positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which is responsible for COVID-19 disease.
3. Practice social distancing.
4. Wear a courtesy face covering.
5. Wash your hands frequently.
6. Take personal responsibility to keep your work area clean, as well as any equipment you may use (e.g., copiers). Be sure to wipe down surface areas when entering and leaving.
7. Take care of yourself through healthy practices regarding nutrition, sleep, exercise, and ergonomics.
8. Assume others act with the best of intentions; be kind to others.
9. Maintain privacy of any information you have at home.
10. Be frugal to reduce expenses.
11. Support and comply with the decisions, guidelines/rules of the University Administration.
12. Align with LEADS 2025 Goals.

Protocols

These procedures and actions for employees, supervisors, and administrators will help protect the health and safety of NMSU faculty, staff, students, and visitors by reducing the risk of infection and transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus at NMSU.

Individual protocols:

1. Sick employees must stay at home. Supervisors must enforce this requirement and immediately send home any employee exhibiting signs of any illness.
2. All employees must practice social distancing (6 feet minimum distance); if social distancing is not possible, courtesy face coverings or other types of controls designed to reduce the risk of virus transmission must be used.
3. Supervisors will know to report all positive cases to NMSU Aggie Health & Wellness Center and provide work location information to use in contact tracing.
4. Employees must attend staff training on COVID-19 risk factors, protective behaviors, and NMSU policies, procedures, and resources related to the virus. Supervisors can contact EHS&RM and HRS for assistance. (Available online and must be completed before returning to work.) ***Farm crew labors who have already been approved to work must complete the training within 10 days of it becoming available.***

5. Only one person at a time is allowed in university vehicles. If this is not possible, all people in the vehicle must wear a courtesy face covering or respirator and maximize distancing as much as reasonable.
- 6.

Space and scheduling protocols:

7. Common areas and publicly accessible areas must be clearly posted with university-approved signs and markings that reinforce social distancing requirements. University approved signage is available through Facilities and Services. Departments and other administrative units are responsible for posting their own areas and Building Monitors post public areas such as lobbies.
8. Rearrange workspaces to facilitate social distancing requirements between co-workers. Departments will initiate work requests for facilities support to accomplish major changes.
9. Departmental, Agricultural Science Centers (ASC) supervisors, and County Directors establish work schedules that promote a reduction in staff to reduce occupancy density of building/gathering areas.
 1. Establish alternating on-site work and telework days.
 2. Schedule extra or alternate shifts, using extended day/extended time as needed.
 3. Allow staff to telework, where possible as long as it does not disrupt or diminish the quality of required services or operations.
10. Departments, administrative units, ASCs, and Extension offices will establish entry and exit logs for all areas under their control. Additionally, it is encouraged that all individuals keep a personal contact log of individuals they came in contact with during the day. Pocket notebooks, calendars, or phone apps may be the most effective tool.
11. Whenever possible, use virtual communication tools to minimize face-to-face contacts such as meetings and training sessions.
12. Limit in-person lab space to only those who can easily maintain minimum social distancing requirements, but at least two individuals should be in a lab at one time to maintain safety standards.
13. Limit the number of people at gatherings and reserve meeting spaces large enough that all attendees can easily maintain minimum social distancing requirements. (*This is dependent on guidelines and restrictions implemented by the governor of NM*).
14. Reduce the number of areas in university facilities, off-campus ASCs, and Extension offices that are accessible to the public. Use signage to identify restricted areas.

Sanitation protocols:

15. Cooperate with and support Facilities and Services and county janitorial staff as they implement university-wide actions in response to the Sars-CoV-2 virus (additional details provided online).

16. All departments, units, and County Offices are responsible for increased level of sanitizing common areas (meeting rooms, break rooms, labs, etc.) and equipment under their control.
17. Employees are responsible for increased level of sanitizing personal equipment (keyboards, computer mouse, phones, desktops, hand tools, etc.) in their offices and workspaces.
- 18.

Information and travel:

19. Supervisors should keep up-to-date on the latest COVID-19 information and protocols (additional information provided online).
20. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that protocols for employees are communicated and followed
21. Restrict nonessential business travel to locations with ongoing COVID-19 outbreaks. If travel is required,
 1. Follow [NMSU Travel Approval Requirements](#)
 2. Check [CDC Travel Warnings](#) and [U.S. Department of State Travel Advisories](#) before scheduling travel.

Supervisor Guide to Evaluate and Reduce Worker Risk

Supervisors must evaluate and develop appropriate protocols to reduce staff exposure to the SARS-CoV-2 virus. To help determine appropriate workplace precautions, OSHA has provided [guidance](#) that categorizes jobs into four exposure risk levels:

1. Very High Risk
2. High Risk
3. Medium Risk
4. Lower Risk

***Follow university protocol for each level of risk. Available online.**

Appendix B
New Mexico State University COVID-19 Return to Research
Commitment to Public Health Practices

Name _____

Aggie ID _____

To minimize the risk to public health while performing research at the New Mexico State University– students, staff and faculty are expected to adhere to public health practices to minimize the spread of COVID19.

By signing this form you agree to adhere to the behaviors and expectations below.

These have been discussed with you by

_____ (Research Group Leader) on
_____ (date)

The Research Group Leader providing this agreement understands it is their responsibility, to the best of their ability, to promote and enforce these public health behaviors.

_____ I will limit my exposure to COVID-19 by maintaining social distancing guidelines professionally and personally.

_____ I will wear the appropriate personal protective equipment and practice proper handwashing techniques frequently.

_____ I agree to closely monitor my health and will not enter a university building or participate in face-to-face research activities if I develop or display symptoms of COVID-19 including but not limited to fever, tiredness and dry cough.

_____ As required, I will monitor my temperature daily. I will not report enter a university building or participate in face-to-face research activities if my temperature exceeds 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

_____ I agree to decontaminate work surfaces at the beginning and end of my work.

_____ I agree to follow other New Mexico State University guidelines for ethical research to protect the public health as necessary.

_____ I understand that failure to follow these expected behaviors would be detrimental to public health efforts and could impact my ability to perform research or other tasks at NMSU.

_____ My Research Group Leader has provided a Research Operation / Exposure Control Plan for minimizing impact of COVID-19 to me and I have read the Plan. I will comply with the policies and procedures established by the my laboratory or research group and will comply with policies and procedures in other NMSU facilities I use.

Signing this commitment to public health practices means that you have read, understand and respect the efforts described above.

Signature

Date

*Please return completed agreement to the Faculty PI / Research Group Leader
and College Dean*

Appendix C- For staff/ students conducting research on campus or in the field.

The following safety plan should be completed and signed electronically by the student/staff and their faculty mentors after they have met virtually to discuss their research program. A copy of the completed plan should be provided to the Biology Department Head. This plan will be made available to the VPR's office and any other research- or health-related entities. Note this safety plan is based on current and anticipated guidelines for safe research issued at the university, state, and federal level (see CDC website links below). As these guidelines change, this research plan should be modified to follow up-to-date guidelines.

Research Scholar _____
Faculty Mentor _____

Department _____
Building and Room(s) _____

I. **General Principles:** All research will be conducted following these general principles. Please check to confirm each practice will be followed:

- _____ Work will be conducted in a low-density environment, with at least 50 sq feet allotted per person (equivalent to 8 feet of social distance, or one person per typical research bench). When training or safe supervision require closer distances, students and mentees should pay special attention to PPE and consider additional controls like safety glasses or face shields to minimize the possibility of infection.
- _____ Students and other lab members will wear PPE equivalent to BSL2 conditions (gloves, lab coats, no eating or drinking) plus personal facemasks (fabric or equivalent).
- _____ Work time in the lab will be logged using sign-in sheets or electronic means to enable contact tracing. Students should also be prepared to provide lists of recent contacts and locations visited outside of the lab for contact tracing in case an infection is suspected.
- _____ Students will spend the minimum amount of time necessary in the lab to conduct their procedures, and confine their activities to necessary workspaces (and bathrooms).
- _____ Students will clean and disinfect their lab stations before and after use. The general lab environment will be cleaned regularly.
- _____ Students and other lab workers will take and record their own temperature daily. If they are running a temperature or show other symptoms of COVID. infection they must not return to work and will contact the Campus Health Center immediately for information regarding testing.
- _____ Any confirmed COVID cases will move immediately into social isolation for 2 weeks and provide any necessary information for contact tracing.
- _____ Students and mentors will keep themselves up to date on CDC symptoms and safety guidelines via the CDC websites:
Symptoms: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>

Workplace safety: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>

- _____ Mentees and mentors will promptly complete any NMSU training pertaining to COVID safety when made available.
- _____ Field-based research will follow the same principles of social distancing, proper PPE, health monitoring and cleanliness (please detail below).
- _____ Labs may be inspected by EH&S staff to monitor compliance with this safety plan.

II. **Accommodations:** Accommodations will be made for any health or safety concerns expressed by either students, staff, or mentors, and no one unwilling to engage in or oversee lab-based research should be asked to do so. If there are any accommodations or additional safety measures that are necessary please detail here. Note you do NOT need to disclose here why these accommodations are requested if you do not wish to do so:

III. **Lab-specific Safety Plan:** Different labs and research projects may present unique conditions that impact safety. Please detail here any project-specific safety procedures for your research:

- IV. **Personal Responsibility:** The Department of Biology is planning to have a phase in schedule to return to campus. We understand that we have the potential for setting back the entire NMSU research enterprise if we are careless and contribute to enhanced COVID transmission, and so undertake to adhere to this research plan in its entirety.

Student/Staff/personnel

Faculty Mentor