

# Guidelines for Research Lab Use During the COVID-19 Pandemic

## Scope

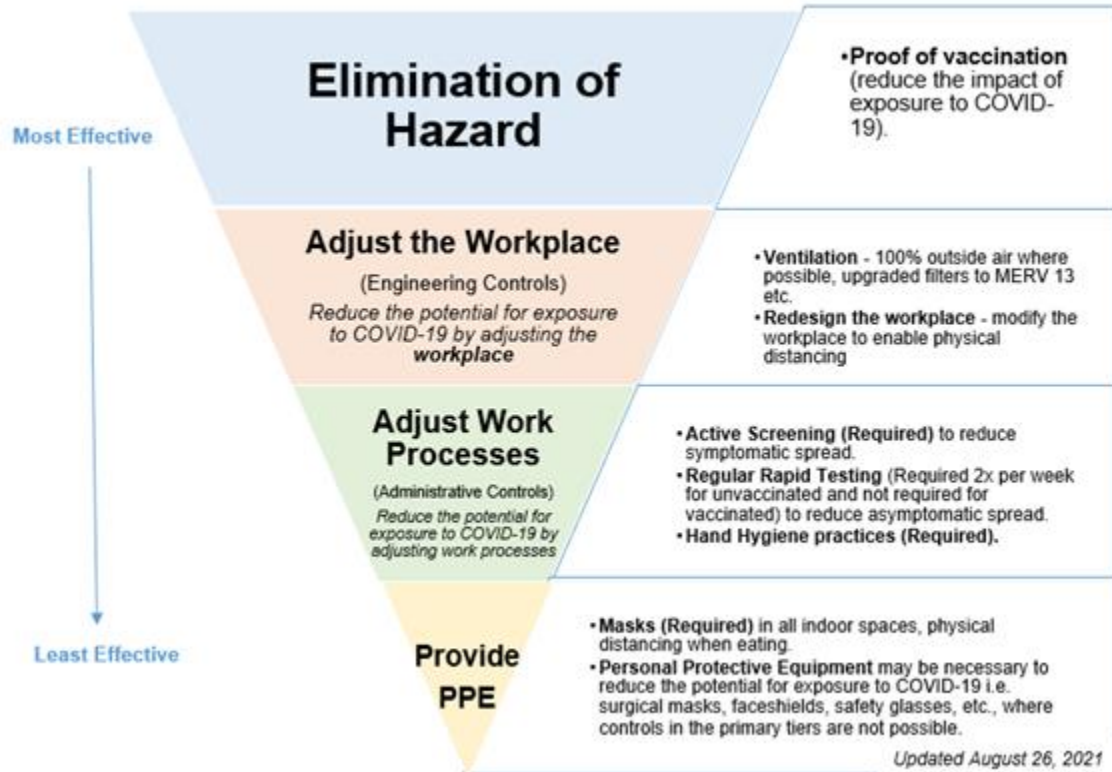
The guidelines outlined in this document will assist in the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) related to **Research Lab Use** and will help to ensure the appropriate COVID-19 health and safety considerations for the protection of all members of the McMaster community.

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## Hierarchy of Hazard Control

Hazard mitigation should always focus on implementing control measures to eliminate or reduce risk. For this purpose, the hierarchy of controls must be considered. This hierarchy can be applied to any hazard in the workplace including COVID-19. A brief overview of this concept is highlighted below.



## Screening and Tracking

- All individuals must complete screening using the MacCheck digital tool within 1 hour before arriving on campus.
- If an individual becomes sick, they must stop work and inform their supervisor immediately.
- Keep detailed records of where you have traveled and locations of the work such that tracking can be provided to the local public health unit should an employee become ill with COVID-19.

## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)/Face Coverings

Please refer to the [Guidelines/Protocols for Face Coverings and Masks During COVID-19 Pandemic](#) for information on face covering protocols while on campus.

## Guidelines for all Labs

### Physical State of Labs

1. Water may not have been run in the labs for weeks. Sinks, including pot sinks, may have air pockets due to shut offs – at first use turn taps on slowly and run until clear. Ensure the flushing of the eyewash/showers for at least 15 minutes.
2. Check all rubber tubing before connecting to glassware – it may have dried out and cracked. Replace as necessary.
3. Check all solvent stills and peroxide formers before using. Consider hazardous waste disposal as necessary.
4. Drain traps may have dried out – this will create a sewer gas odour in some labs. Pour water down the floor drains to refill the traps (running the sinks will have helped but some floor traps may be missed). Contact [Facility Services](#) for trap oil which will float on top of the water and prevent it from drying out.

### Working in the Labs

1. As a best practice, space individuals out in the labs and or create a schedule to limit the number of individuals in the lab as well as any office space as per the Public Health Ontario guidelines. Use a scheduling program such as Outlook so that all group members know when and how many people are in the lab at all times.
2. If necessary, limit research to certain days or stagger work for your group depending on its size. For example: 15' of linear bench space = 2 people working at the bench. If the bench is an island, 2 people on one side, one person on the other side, in a triangular arrangement, is acceptable. One 6' hood is now the space for one researcher; however, they should only use the space normally occupied in a hood so that additional researchers can use the hood during their scheduled times. Ensure the proper sanitization of all surfaces prior to and after completing work.
3. Hand washing or sanitizing, where handwashing is not possible, is extremely important – washing hands at least 20 seconds with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Wash your hands as soon as you enter and before you leave the lab. Custodial staff will be increasing the frequency of cleaning highly touched surfaces such as door handles, elevators and washrooms. Cleaning within the labs is the responsibility of the occupants. Wipe down your benches, equipment, sashes, knobs, keyboards, etc. at the end of each person's use and each day. Place signs or label shared equipment with reminders to wipe down prior to and after using.
4. Regular PPE necessary for the lab environment should be provided as usual by the PI or supervisor. Ensure an adequate supply is available before starting experiments. PPE that is shared such as laser safety eyewear should be disinfected after each use. Develop a system to indicate this - label the pouches 'sanitized' for example. Do not share lab coats - assign/label and provide to individuals. Lab gloves should not be worn outside the lab. Use a pen or elbow to activate door openers and elevator buttons.

## Graduate Student and Research Offices

Recognizing that offices for researchers will be necessary due to the restrictions on storage of food and personal belongings in lab spaces, at this time the office spaces will be used for this purpose only. The regular use of offices should be limited until further progression through the phases of returning to campus. At which point the guidelines below must be applied.

### **Working in the Offices**

1. Physical distancing (2m) continues to apply – if desks are 6’ apart and there are 5 or fewer people in the office, no changes may be necessary – consider the back to back distances as well as entering and leaving the office - maintain the 6’ at all times. What was normally a 4-person office space may now only be a 2-person space. Directional arrows and signage may be necessary.
2. Utilize unused offices to create additional space.
3. Conference rooms and meeting rooms should also be used as temporary office spaces.
4. Rotating of lab/office times or shifts for work may be necessary – work out what is best for the research you do.
5. Consider temporary “office hoteling” space – no office belongs to any one person but is used temporarily each day by a different person. This will maximize office space; however, good house cleaning practices are extremely important - wipe down surfaces before you leave.
6. Encourage people to bring their lunches and beverages and keep them at their desks. Shared appliances such as fridges, microwaves and coffee makers should be removed or made inaccessible.

### **Resources**

- Public Health Agency of Canada [Prevention and Risks](#)
- Government of Canada [Digital Tools](#)
- [Public Health of Ontario](#)
- [Government of Ontario](#)