

# Ramp up Plan for SUNY Downstate Laboratory Research

## Overarching Plan

The laboratory research ramp-up guidelines outlined in this document are derived from the center-wide principles and protocols developed by the SUNY Downstate “Back To New Normal” committee (BTNN; [www.downstate.edu/health-alerts/back-to-new-normal.html](http://www.downstate.edu/health-alerts/back-to-new-normal.html)), a multidisciplinary working group of faculty and staff representing diverse research interests and settings from all Downstate schools, colleges, and medical facilities, faculty experts in infectious disease, and the Research Foundation. All centerwide BTNN rules and guidelines, such as building entrance and elevator usage policies, social-distancing definitions, and mask-usage requirements apply to laboratory research ramp-up.

This plan applies to research in Downstate HSU buildings. Downstate trainees and staff performing research at affiliated sites (e.g., Maimonides, Kings County, ...) should adhere to the research restart policies of those institutions.

Any inconsistencies, ambiguities, or points of confusion should be clarified with the Office of the SVP for Research <[SVP-research-office@downstate.edu](mailto:SVP-research-office@downstate.edu)>.

## Current State

As of the release of 6/25/20, the COVID-19 rules governing laboratory research activity and practices are as defined in the 3/27/20 memo from Dean Brunicardi. The overarching policy has been: “Access to labs is strictly limited to two persons per PI’s lab at any one time, only if there is adequate space for two people to be there and to maintain the required social-distancing recommendation of six feet. There are no exceptions to this rule aside from COVID-19 related work that <Dean Brunicardi has> approved.”

## Guiding Principles

With the gradual decline of new COVID-19 cases in New York, it is appropriate to initiate the ramping up of on-site laboratory research activities at SUNY Downstate. Research ramp-up must be a careful and deliberate process that considers three major overarching principles/values:

**SAFETY** - First and most importantly, the process must be **safe**. Our approach must protect the health and safety of our workforce. This is best achieved through a ramp-up that emphasizes social distancing and use of masks according to the BTNN Rules. If it is not necessary to physically be at Downstate to perform specific duties, as determined by the laboratory head, it is advisable to continue to work off site for the immediate future.

**FLEXIBILITY** - Second, the process must allow for appropriate **flexibility**. Flexible policies will permit PIs to ramp-up their laboratories in the most appropriate manner. As noted below, each PI is required to develop a plan to ramp-up research activities that is based on these guidelines and customized for their laboratory. Notably, because modification in timing may be required in the event that COVID-19 cases resurge, adjustments, including another ramp down, may occur.

**COMMUNITY** - Lastly, as we ramp-up research activities, we must **support** each other and work together, remembering that we are part of the larger Downstate community. We need each PI to be responsive to challenges faced by their research personnel and help manage their concerns in returning to on-campus work in concert with Downstate Human Resources.

With these principles in mind, below are the guidelines for ramping up laboratory research activities at Downstate. These policies cannot address every possible scenario, and for any issues not addressed in



these guidelines, decisions should follow the spirit of these guiding principles. As national, state, local and institutional policies continue to develop, changes may be necessary to these guidelines.

## Laboratory Research Ramp-up Phases

Laboratory research activity will be phased in as described below:

**Phase 1 (effective July 1) - Low-density Research:** PIs may begin to ramp-up research activities once they have received approval of a *Laboratory-specific Ramp-up Plan* (see below). PIs must develop and propose laboratory-specific social-distancing and mask usage plans for their main lab and any ancillary rooms (e.g., tissue culture, microscope room, equipment, etc.). Please note that even if adequate social distancing is feasible as proposed, the laboratory-specific plan may be modified by the Office of the SVP for Research if doing so is necessary for Downstate to meet our overall NY State imposed personnel limitations.

**Phase 2 (when all NYS and NYC restrictions are lifted) – Full-density Research:** PIs may ramp-up full research activities. Launch will depend on the success of Phase 1, epidemiologic data, and state and local restrictions. Details will be announced in advance of the launch of Phase 2.

If data indicates resurge in COVID-19 cases and as restrictions are ramped up, we may have to reimpose restrictions.

## Laboratory Research Ramp-up Guidelines

### 1. Laboratory readiness preparation

EHS has developed guidelines to consider as we ramp up laboratory research activities. PIs should refer to the [EHS laboratory ramp-up checklist](#) as they develop their reopening plan.

### 2. Social Distancing and Mask Policies

As noted above, social distancing and mask usage are central to the ramp-up plan:

- Stationary work positions must be located more than 6' (in radius; i.e., in all directions) from the nearest other stationary work positions. When transitioning between work positions (e.g., moving from one instrument to another), staff are allowed to pass closer than 6' to another staff member, but must minimize such occurrences and not congregate.
- **Masks must be worn at all times inside any room if there are more than 1 person present, even if those present are more than 6' apart.** All lab-specific PPE requirements remain in effect.

If necessary, staggered shifts or ancillary room rotation rules may be required to ensure proper social distancing. Lunch, breakroom, and conference room usage must adhere to all centerwide rules.

### 3. Developing Work Shifts — Considerations

- a) If shifts are necessary to maintain social distancing, laboratories should develop calendars to schedule work shifts for main lab and ancillary rooms that follow the maximum personnel guidelines.
- b) The structure of schedules and length of shifts are determined by the PI. Personal circumstances and outside obligations should be considered when developing shifts. PIs should be flexible with assigning shifts. If a suitable arrangement cannot be made, please contact your Human Resources Business Partner for assistance. Shifts can be scheduled in a variety of ways, including time of day (morning, afternoon) or days of week (i.e. Mon-Wed, Thur-Sat), and spread within the facility (i.e. working in different rooms, different bays, etc.) to avoid close interactions.

- c) When feasible, personnel should enter and leave research buildings at non-standard times to avoid congestion coming into the building and using elevators. Personnel should take stairs, if possible, to reduce elevator traffic.
- d) Working alone between 8pm-6am alone is discouraged for safety reasons, but can occur with an approved safety plan.
- e) The schedule should be strictly followed. Everyone should complete work within their shift.
- f) Shifts should focus primarily on completing wet-lab based tasks. Non-experimental activities (e.g., updating notebooks, analyzing data, reading and writing) should be done remotely.

#### **4. Sequence of staff return**

The following should be considered to determine the order of scheduling returning staff:

- a) Top priority should be given to graduate students, postdocs, medical students (including rising year-1 medical students), and other trainees.
- b) Consideration should be given to trainees who need to complete their research projects in a timely fashion and/or those who have critical deadlines like a thesis deadline, a paper submission, or a grant submission deadline.
- c) Stagger personnel to accommodate as many as possible to ramp-up their research projects.
- d) PIs should consider grouping personnel into cohorts with shared research goals to work around the same time.
- e) Volunteers and visitors (including undergraduate and high school students) are not allowed in Downstate laboratories, without special permission from the SVP of Research, until further notice by the BTNN committee.

#### **5. Personal and Laboratory Protection**

- a) All personnel should self-monitor for symptoms, including temperature, daily before coming on site. Any personnel feeling unwell should not come to the laboratory and should notify their supervisor.
- b) Diligently wash hands with soap upon entering and leaving the research site and frequently throughout the day. At a minimum, maintain a supply of hand sanitizer in work spaces without hand washing sinks; however, make this available for all work areas if feasible.
- c) Remove PPE (except masks) before leaving the lab. Gloves, labcoats, and eye protection should not be worn outside of the lab except if transitioning a short distance from one lab room to another. A mask must be worn in all Downstate areas except when alone in a room or when eating.
- d) The PI should designate someone to wipe down bench surfaces, door knobs, keyboards, cabinet handles, ocular lenses, equipment surfaces, etc. (as appropriate) with 70% ethanol daily at the beginning and end of each shift. Additionally, equipment users should do so before and after each use.
- e) The research ramp-up may lead to personnel working alone at times. Labs are encouraged to establish virtual buddy systems with a lab member, member of a neighboring lab, or supervisor who they can call or text to check in/out and ensure safety.

#### **6. Division of Comparative Medicine**

The Division of Comparative Medicine is coordinating operational changes with the reopening of Downstate laboratory research. Investigators can begin to ramp back up animal populations via breeding

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(using appropriate weaning to avoid cage overcrowding) and/or the normal DCM animal ordering process.

## 7. Laboratory communication

To ensure social distancing, all meetings – including lab meetings, work/research-in-progress meetings, journal clubs, seminars, and faculty meetings – should be held virtually until further notice.

## 8. Compliance

All laboratories must adhere to these policies. It is the responsibility of the PI and other laboratory supervisors to enforce physical and temporal distancing measures, mask requirements, social distancing, and other safety regulations. We are confident that faculty, students, and staff understand the importance of these policies and will operate accordingly. An allegation of non-compliance may be reported anonymously to the confidential Compliance Line (877-349-SUNY or via [Compliance Line Website](http://www.compliance-helpline.com/downstate.jsp) [www.compliance-helpline.com/downstate.jsp](http://www.compliance-helpline.com/downstate.jsp)).

## Laboratory-Specific Ramp-up Plan

Each PI is required to submit a Laboratory Research Ramp-up Plan ([Word template attached](#)), to be approved by the Office of the SVP for Research **before initiating ramp up of research operations**. The PI should work with their research group to develop a plan that facilitates an organized and staged ramp-up of research.

To submit the completed plan, please email the attachment to [svp-research-office@downstate.edu](mailto:svp-research-office@downstate.edu) with the subject line "Laboratory Research Ramp-up Plan – last name, first name."