

ICTAS COVID-19 Phase One Research Laboratory Reopening v. 1 June 2020

As described in the attached document from the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation (OVPRI) “Phase 1 Reopen_FINAL”, Virginia Tech is proceeding with phased reopening of research laboratories that have been closed during the Virginia Stay-at-Home order. This is in accordance with the Governor’s Phase One of the [Forward Virginia](#) plan. As described in that document, **each laboratory and researcher needs to be approved at the college or institute level prior to restarting laboratory research**. It is incumbent on each of us to minimize the risk that we might spread COVID-19 to others by following the regulations below. The procedure for obtaining ICTAS approval is described at the end of this document.

Please note that this procedure does not apply to in-person human subjects research. The VT Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) anticipates circulating a form to those groups who have IRB-approved human subjects research protocols during the week of May 26th. Research groups must fill out that form and return it for approval to HRPP in order to resume in-person human subjects research. HRPP approval will be in lieu of ICTAS approval for human subjects research.

In order to obtain ICTAS approval to resume non-human subjects-based laboratory research, all of the rules, regulations, and guidelines contained in OVPRI’s [Reopening Guidance](#) and contained on the [OVPRI COVID-19 website](#) must be followed.

This includes:

- Anyone displaying symptoms of COVID-19 or who has recently tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 (the novel coronavirus) is not allowed to be in the laboratory.
- The OVPRI “[COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedures for On-site Laboratories](#)” must be followed with the exception that gloves are now not required for the purposes of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) but are recommended where they are helpful in avoiding exposure to SARS-CoV-2. This document should be posted in each laboratory.
- Face masks are required at all times in research laboratories. Cloth coverings or disposable/surgical masks are preferred. It is acceptable for an employee to use their own “non-VT-provided” PPE. Please see below for additional information on face coverings.

- Unless specifically requested and approved, individuals must maintain 6-foot separation at all times.
- If researchers absolutely must be closer than 6 feet for other than minimal passing, more extensive personal protective equipment (such as N95 masks) must be used. A description of those additional measures will need to be specified in the approval process (see below - [Obtaining ICTAS Approval to Reopen a Laboratory](#)).
- Hands should be washed regularly throughout the day. Avoid touching your face.
- Used surfaces should be disinfected according to the guidelines in the attached document "[Guidelines for COVID-19 Laboratory Disinfection 03.24.2020](#)". (70% ethanol solutions and/or Clorox/Lysol disinfectant wipes are examples of appropriate supplies.) At a minimum, researchers should appropriately disinfect all surfaces they used that day before leaving the lab. Surfaces should also be disinfected between uses by different researchers.
- No more than 10 people are allowed in any individual space at one time.
- Each laboratory will keep a log of the dates and times that each researcher was present and in which laboratory spaces in order to enable contact tracing should it become necessary. It is recommended that the logs be maintained in an electronic format (e.g., google sheet) so the information can be shared in a timely fashion if needed.
- Paid researchers including undergraduate, graduate students carrying out research towards their dissertation, and post doctoral associates are allowed in laboratories. Undergraduate research for credit will not be allowed at this stage of reopening.

It is imperative that anyone who is not comfortable being in the laboratory at this stage of reopening will not be compelled to do so. The virus is still present in our community. For example, anyone who is at higher risk for serious illness or who lives with or cares for someone who is at higher risk should be allowed to continue telework. In Phase 1 of reopening, no researcher is required to explain why they wish to continue telework. Individuals wishing not to enter the laboratories should indicate their desire in writing to their direct supervisor and discuss realignment of their duties.

Face Coverings: It is important to note that wearing a face covering does reduce the likelihood of contracting the virus. The primary reason for wearing a face covering is to protect others in case you are infected but not (yet) symptomatic. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines for face coverings are provided [here](#). CDC

recommends that cloth face coverings be used, but disposable and surgical masks are also acceptable for laboratory work. The CDC website above provides instructions for making cloth face coverings.

Obtaining ICTAS Approval to Reopen a Laboratory: If researchers can meet all of the guidelines above, a faculty member / principal investigator may request that their lab(s) be reopened for research. This is done by providing ICTAS the following information via email to Ross Verbrugge (rossv@vt.edu ; 540-231-4625).

1. Name and PID of the faculty member / principal investigator
2. Location / lab to be reopened - building and room number(s)
3. Name, PID and position (e.g. postdoc, graduate student, paid undergraduate) of each researcher along with the laboratories (building(s) and room numbers) that they will occupy.

Example:

Name

PID

Position

Room & Building (**options for multiple locations**)

4. Discuss the essential nature of your research as included in one of the categories outlined by OVPRI (noted below and [here](#) under “Essential Research”).
 - Is associated with human or animal care and well-being;
 - If discontinued would pose a safety hazard;
 - Is related to COVID-19 research with a timeline for deployment to support the current crisis;
 - Is necessary to maintain key equipment, facilities, data, samples, materials, or other basic capacities that will be needed quickly upon change of operational status back to normal;
 - Involves an activity that has U.S. or Virginia government-mandated security and access requirements, cannot be performed remotely, and is deemed essential by the U.S. or Virginia government; or
 - Is deemed essential or able to continue by the dean, vice president, or institute director. The approver must take steps to ensure that appropriate social distancing, use of PPE, and surface disinfection practices are followed.

Approval Process:

Step 1 - Upon submission of the information above, ICTAS will review the information and will then let you know when your laboratories have been approved as essential research and allowed to proceed to Step 2. ICTAS intends to provide approvals or requests for additional information (if necessary) within one day.

Step 2 - Upon approval in Step 1, the faculty member/PI shall submit an operating plan utilizing the university's [COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedures for On-Site Laboratories](#) as a baseline with any special operational procedures appended. This form must be signed by the PI and other lab personnel (electronic signatures are acceptable) when submitted, and this form must be posted on the lab door once operations commence.

Enforcement: Everyone has a right to a safe environment. If anyone observes someone not abiding by these guidelines, they will first ask that person to comply. If the researcher does not comply, they will then be reported to the faculty member / principal investigator who will resolve the situation. **Any researcher who does not comply will risk having their laboratory access revoked.** If the faculty member / principal investigator is not able to resolve the situation, or anyone is uncomfortable reporting the behavior to the faculty member / principal investigator, the behavior should be reported to Ross Verbrugge, Director of Facilities, and then, if necessary, to Stefan Duma, Executive Director.