

## **Proposal for reopening laboratory and animal research at Rush**

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### **Taskforce members:**

Lena Al-Harthi

Andrew Bean

Joshua Jacobs

Anne-Marie Malfait (chair)

Rachel Miller

Kristin Moody

Jeffrey Oswald

D. Rick Sumner

Markus Wimmer

Taskforce e-convended on April 29 2020 to discuss and propose a plan to re-start laboratory and animal research at Rush.

Affected buildings: Cohn, Jelke, AAC, MOR

### **General principles**

1. As education and research are cornerstones of Rush University's vital mission it is important that laboratory research, including animal research, restart at Rush in a timely manner. This re-entry proposal is rooted in safety for the health and well-being of faculty, staff, trainees, and the public.
2. Re-engagement of research at Rush will be aligned and consistent with health and safety guidelines that have been recommended by the IDPH, Rush ID, and Rush Leadership and will follow a phased reopening model.
3. Limited essential laboratory research has been allowed to continue at Rush with minimal faculty/staff/trainee involvement. The COVID-19 Laboratory Research Task Force has considered studies for exceptions to the essential-only research policy that are focused on advancing our understanding of SARS-CoV-2.
4. A state-wide universal masking policy went into effect on May 1 that coincided with an adjustment to the stay-at-home order, allowing some non-essential business and services to reopen, however our understanding of SARS-CoV-2 is evolving and plans may be updated as additional information becomes available.

## **Phased approach to laboratory activities during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.**

Rush University will phase in a return of research faculty, staff, and trainees in a coordinated process to ensure appropriate physical/social distancing and availability of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Rush will assess expanded staffing based on the ability to control and manage specific work environments and necessity to access on-site resources. These decisions, once approved by University leadership, will be communicated through and monitored by Department Chairs.

The need to reduce the number of people on campus to meet physical/social distancing requirements will continue for some time.

### Phases of laboratory activity

**Phase 1:** Ramping down of lab activities; restriction of building access to essential personnel.

**Phase 2:** Performance of time-sensitive research whose pause would seriously damage future viability of the research program; research that is clearly relevant to COVID-19 (During the Governor's stay-at-home order)

**Phase 3:** Gradual, monitored restarting of some research and careful expansion (following lifting of the Governor's stay-at-home order).

**Phase 4:** Beginning of a return to normal operations with permanently enhanced safety guidelines.

### Laboratory research under the Governor's stay-at-home order

Effective until the end of the Illinois stay-at-home order (currently May 29)

Once buildings are prepared (target week of May 18). We propose:

- Gradual re-entry of essential researchers.
- All personnel should follow the universal masking protocol (see above).
- Physical/social distancing should be followed at all times (see Figures attached).
- Personnel with a temperature of 100.4 F or higher and/or other symptoms (cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, headache, chest tightness, extreme fatigue, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea, muscle aches) should not come to work.
- This is a voluntary return to work. PIs cannot coerce their research staff. Students cannot be coerced.

- Department Chairs, or their designees will authorize the re-opening of specific labs and monitor their adherence to scheduling (see Figures attached) and safety policies.

### Research After the Governor's Stay At Home Order Ends

We propose requirements that apply to wet-labs as we begin the transition from phase 2 to phase 3. While we believe that we can move forward and bring more researchers back to campus, we recognize that Rush should reserve the right to return to phase 2 or even 1 if the situation dictates or to relocate or remove employees as needed. Our guiding principle is, and will continue to be, to mitigate health and safety risks to faculty, staff and trainees based on the advice of health care professionals and other experts.

To reduce the risks of faculty, staff and trainees potentially being exposed to SARS-CoV-2 in the workplace or exposing others, we should aim to keep the density of our workforce as low as possible at any given time and to create a balanced daily plan that maintains safe distances between employees. The most important three elements that will help keep our faculty, staff, and trainees safe are: (i) wearing a Rush-issued face mask (ii) regular hand washing; and (iii) physical/social distancing. Compliance with the instructions outlined below, as well as from individual PIs, Department Chairs, and Rush administration should be required for continued access – to help ensure compliance violation could result in the revocation of building access privileges and/or other appropriate disciplinary action.

No two laboratories are alike. The directives listed here describe approaches devised in consultation with infectious disease experts and are in alignment with institutions across the country. There may be laboratory-specific safety issues that should be brought to the attention of individual PIs and/or Department Chairs. For example, some laboratory work may involve the frequent use of shared equipment, such as a microscope, and extra cleaning precautions should be taken to minimize the risk for coworkers using this shared resource. To reduce our collective risk as much as possible, a partnership must exist between each person working in a laboratory and the PI, Department Chair, building manager, and the University. We are developing a structure in which the four Rush buildings in which the majority of bench research occurs will have a point of contact person, Chris Kanakis, who will work directly with the University as issues arise. Mr. Kanakis (or Kristin Moody in the Cohn Building) should be the first point of contact for building-related issues.

### Staffing Options

There are several options departments can consider to maintain required physical/social distancing measures and reduce population density within buildings and work spaces.

**Remote Work:** Those who can work remotely to fulfill some or all of their work responsibilities may continue to do so to reduce the number of individuals on campus and the potential spread

of SARS-CoV-2. These arrangements, which should be approved by the immediate supervisor, can be done on a full or partial day/week schedule as appropriate.

**Alternating Days:** To limit the number of individuals and interactions among those on campus, departments could schedule partial staffing on alternating days. Such schedules will help enable physical/social distancing, especially in areas with large common workspaces.

**Staggered Reporting/Departing:** The beginning and end of the workday typically bring many people together at common entry/exit points of buildings. Staggering reporting and departure times will reduce traffic in common areas to meet physical/social distancing requirements. We propose a shift plan (figures attached) in which each laboratory defines when particular laboratory space will be used and the times of day during which individuals will work in the lab space (see attached spreadsheet). This shift plan could be facilitated using a restricted badged entry plan.

### Safety Practices

**Face masks:** Face masks must be worn by all staff working on campus when in the presence of others and in public settings where other physical/social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., common work spaces, meeting rooms, classrooms, etc.). Appropriate use of face masks is critical in minimizing risks to others near you. You could spread SARS-CoV-2 to others even if you do not feel sick. The mask is not a substitute for physical/social distancing.

Disposable masks will be provided by Rush at the entries to research buildings, if needed. Disposable masks may only be worn for one day and then must be placed in the trash.

**Restrooms:** Use of restrooms should be limited, based on size, to ensure at least 6 feet distance between individuals. Signage should be installed to emphasize hand washing to reduce the potential transmission of the virus. Restroom cleaning should be emphasized to EVS/DFS.

**Using Elevators:** Signage should be installed to emphasize no more than two people entering an elevator at a time, use of the stairs should be encouraged by signage, as should hand sanitizer usage (Dispensers should be installed in buildings that do not have them near elevators) upon departing the elevator.

**Kitchens:** Kitchen refrigerators should not be used at this time because of the inability to monitor and keep them disinfected. Signage should be installed.

### **Comparative Research Center (CRC) Animal Facility:**

- Proper PPE in the CRC includes a Rush issued face mask, gloves and covering or replacing of street clothes with a lab coat, yellow isolation gown or scrub uniform
- No more than two individuals may occupy and work in an animal holding room – this includes animal care technicians performing husbandry procedures.

- No more than 2 individuals may occupy and work in any procedure room in the CRC including the necropsy room, 047 Cohn
- No more than 3 people may occupy and work in a CRC surgery suite which includes at least one CRC certified veterinary technician monitoring anesthesia
- Teaching and training surgical labs requiring more than 3 individuals in a CRC surgery suite should remain suspended. Exceptions may be submitted to Dr. Bean ([Andrew\\_J\\_Bean@rush.edu](mailto:Andrew_J_Bean@rush.edu)) for consideration by the COVID-19 Laboratory Research Committee

Meetings: Convening in groups increases the risk of viral transmission. Where feasible, meetings should be held in whole or part using the extensive range of available collaboration tools (e.g. Zoom, WebEx, Microsoft Teams, Jabber, telephone, etc.). In person meetings should be limited to the restrictions of local, state and federal orders and should not exceed 50 percent of the capacity of a room, assuming individuals can still maintain 6 feet of separation for physical/social distancing requirements. Departments should remove or rearrange chairs and tables or add visual cue marks in meeting rooms to support physical/social distancing practices between attendees. Collegial communication by email, instant message, telephone or other available technology should be encouraged, rather than face-to-face meetings.

#### Areas of need within Rush research buildings

- Provide signage and masks in Cohn/Jelke/AAC/MOR labs, elevators, restrooms, and entry doors for the essential workers currently reporting to work as soon as possible.
- Signage should include the following information
  - Use of masks is required
  - Instructions on how to put on and take off masks
  - Instructions on proper handwashing need and technique
  - Instructions on physical/social distancing and number of people allowed per square footage
  - Instructions on daily self-monitoring of temperature and other symptoms.
  - Contact phone numbers to report a problem.

In addition, the following recommendations are made:

1. Driving to work is encouraged until further notice. Rush is providing support for parking and shared rides.
2. A system to allow operation of communal doors by foot should be considered.
3. Wipes should be provided in breakrooms, to clean highly used equipment such as coffee machines and microwaves.
4. EVS and DFS should be instructed on cleaning areas in which research occurs.

5. Cleaning supplies should be provided on each floor, including bleach, sponges, and wipes.
6. Hand sanitizer should be provided near elevators, restrooms, and laboratories.
7. In case of water outage or other building maintenance issues, email or call all researchers directly (as opposed to the building's manager).

Other considerations:

- Communication should be provided to all researchers, staff, and trainees about the fact that research on SARS-CoV-2 is being conducted in the four research buildings (e.g. using patient derived tissues).
- Rush faculty, staff, and trainees who travel to local Universities to use core facilities must follow the guidelines in the core facility and the institution in which the core resides.
- Non-Rush users to Rush core facilities should be allowed to return to using these facilities once Rush moves to Phase 3 of the reopening plan, only if they coordinate with the Rush core director for scheduling and agree to comply with Rush policies. The core directors will provide documentation to allow limited visitor access only to the building that houses the core facility.

Criteria for faculty, staff, and trainee research re-entry

Clinical and laboratory research are cornerstones of Rush University's vital mission. The guidelines for re-entry into the research environment during circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic are rooted in safety for the health and well-being of faculty, staff, trainees, and the public

Before faculty, staff, and trainees are approved to re-enter the clinical research or laboratory research environments, appropriate PPE must be available to all. To assure PPE is available, Department Chairs should communicate to their departments and/or Chris Kanakis regarding PPE needs so that appropriate orders can be placed in advance of personnel re-entry.

Faculty, staff, or trainees who have needs (health or otherwise) that would preclude them from participating in research at this time should seek accommodations according to the university and medical center policies. Personnel who have tested positive for COVID-19 should follow the Rush System for Health or University guidelines for personnel who test positive for COVID-19.

Personnel who test positive for COVID-19 or are having symptoms associated with COVID-19 infection must follow Rush's policy - <https://www.rushu.rush.edu/about/novel-coronavirus-covid-19-information/health>

## Guidelines for faculty, staff, and trainees who have been infected with COVID-19

The following guidelines are in place to assure that faculty, staff, and trainees who perform research on campus, and who test positive for COVID-19, take the required precautions to assure they are taking care of themselves as well as protecting others around them. Faculty, staff, and trainees should adhere to the following guidelines if they have tested positive for COVID-19:

1. Faculty, staff, and trainees s who test positive for COVID-19 must report this outcome to their supervisor and Rush Employee Corporate Health Services immediately.
2. Faculty, staff, and trainees who have tested positive for COVID-19 and/or in quarantine should comply with their treatment and inform their supervisor one day after they have been cleared to return to campus or research site. Faculty, staff, and trainees who are on campus should follow the guidelines for contact tracing according to Rush System for Health.
3. Faculty, staff, and trainees who intend to return to research environments on campus should provide Rush System's Return-To-Work form to Rush Employee Health.

Table 1. Designated mask pick-up for different research buildings (until end of Illinois Stay-at-home order)

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| Cohn  | Cohn foyer   |
| Jelke | Break room on first floor (by vending machines). This may change based on a potential forth floor entry requirement. |
| AAC   | 4 <sup>th</sup> floor entrance from the parking garage   |
| MOR   | 1 <sup>st</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> floor elevators  |