

Return to Work Plan – Phase 1

Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry

Approved by Committee 5/27/2020

Purpose

This plan provides a detailed implementation of the University's Return-to-Work plan https://sc.edu/safety/coronavirus/employee-policies-procedures/return_to_work_plan/index.php. It covers Phase 1, June 1–21, 2020. However, this plan is intended to evolve into policies that are sustainable for a full reopening of the University over an indefinite period of COVID-19 response. The plan may be modified, even within Phase 1, in response to changing circumstances, updated university policy and feedback about its effectiveness.

The plan seeks to minimize transmission of COVID-19 within the workplace, while allowing the department to fulfill its teaching, research and service functions. It is recognized that risk factors and risk tolerance vary within the department and seeks a balance that allows the department to be both safe and productive. If research is not compatible with these policies, it cannot be done on campus.

These guidelines are intended for research and administrative operations and facilities controlled by the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry. During Phase 1, teaching operations and facilities will operate under the same guidelines.

Allowed Personnel

Occupancy limits - Phase 1

In accordance with University policy for Phase 1, these procedures are designed to achieve 30% or lower occupancy of the research buildings.

1. For peak times (weekdays 9:00 am – 5:00 pm), each research group has 12 hrs/week per faculty, graduate student or postdoc to allocate. (This number is 30% of the 40 hrs/week in this period.) The PI will allocate these hours within their group. The distribution over group members and over specific times is flexible, so long as the average over a week meets the target. The department chair will make a similar schedule for departmental personnel.
2. For off-peak times (weekdays 7:00–9:00 am and 5:00–10:00 pm, weekends 9:00 am – 5:00 pm), each research group has 15 hrs/week per faculty, graduate student or postdoc to allocate. (This number is 30% of the 51 hrs/week in this period.) The PI will allocate of these hours within their group. The distribution over group members and over specific times is flexible, so long as the average over a week meets the target.
3. Outside the times listed in (1) and (2), we expect usage to be naturally low. Thus, there are no formal restrictions for these times. However, if they are used, the PI must submit a written plan to the Safety Committee (Berg, Chair) for managing general and chemical security in a low occupancy environment. (See 6.e below.)

4. The low building occupancy poses special challenges for general security and for safety when working with hazardous materials. Each PI will discuss with each of their researchers how to handle these challenges under the Phase 1 schedule. (See 6.e below.) If a safe procedure cannot be found under these restrictions, the work cannot be done.
5. None of these policies will be construed so as to prevent critical research, as defined by the Vice President for Research
https://www.sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/artsandsciences/internal/documents/faculty_staff/vpr_memo_critical_research_activities_form.pdf

Training

6. Before returning to campus, each employee must review the following materials:
 - a. CDC Handwashing Video (2:01 min)
https://www.cdc.gov/video/COVID19/downloadable-Videos/306898_WYKTK_Handwashing.mp4
 - b. CDC “Stop the Germs” Video (0:30 min)
<https://www.cdc.gov/video/COVID19/downloadable-videos/COVID-19-Stop-the-Spread-of-Germs.mp4>
 - c. CDC Face Coverings Poster
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/cloth-face-covering.pdf>
 - d. UofSC Guidelines for Returning to Work Website
https://sc.edu/safety/coronavirus/employee-policies-procedures/guidelines_for_returning/index.php
 - e. ACS “Working in the Lab Alone?” Video (2:14 min)
<https://youtu.be/Y8DBd45W4hY>
 - f. Johns Hopkins/WHO Handwashing Video (1:25 min)
<https://youtu.be/IisgnbMfKvI>

COVID-19 status

7. Employees must fill out the University Daily Screen form every day they work on campus and email it to Chemast4@mailbox.sc.edu within an hour of coming on campus. An electronic version of the form can be found at
https://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/human_resources/docs/daily_health_screening.pdf
8. (a) If an employee has any of the symptoms of COVID-19 listed on the University Daily Screening form, they should report this fact directly to their supervisor. They should not report to campus until they have been free of fever for three days and are currently free of other symptoms, or until they have received a negative COVID-19 test.
(b) If an employee receives a positive COVID-19 test, they should report this fact directly to their supervisor. They should not report to campus until they have received a negative COVID-19 test.
(c) If an employee has been in contact with someone with a positive COVID-19 test, they should report this fact directly to their supervisor. They should not report to campus until 14 days after contact or they have received a negative COVID-19 test.
9. Employees with a status defined by (8) must disclose to their supervisor all recent contacts with other departmental employees that occurred on campus.

10. Once cleared for return to campus, a status defined in (8) may not be used to discriminate against an employee. The EEOC has issued guidance on employees rights and responsibilities in regard to COVID-19

<https://www.eeoc.gov/wysk/what-you-should-know-about-COVID-19-19-and-ada-rehabilitation-act-and-other-eeo-laws>

High-risk employees.

11. High-risk employees include those over 65 yrs of age; those with underlying health conditions, as identified by the CDC

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>

including heart disease, asthma, diabetes, severe obesity, chronic kidney or liver disease and immunocompromising conditions; and anyone routinely caring for someone over 65 yrs of age or with underlying health conditions.

12. High-risk employees are encouraged to inform their supervisor of their high-risk status, although they are not required to disclose the nature of the risk. Supervisors will make reasonable accommodations for high-risk employees, including, but not limited to, requiring more strict distancing near the employee, altering the employee's on-campus schedule or assigning the employee to remote duties.

Undergraduates.

13. No undergraduates are allowed on campus during Phase 1. In Phase 2, students who have received an undergraduate degree and are preparing to officially enter the graduate program in the Fall will be allowed on campus and will be treated as graduate students for the purposes of these policies.

Off-campus preference.

14. If anyone prefers to work off-campus due to concerns for their safety, the department will make reasonable accommodations. However, we cannot guarantee that all required duties can be conducted remotely.

Distancing

Masks or face coverings

Masks are an effective means to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 by asymptomatic and presymptomatic carriers:

<https://rs-delve.github.io/reports/2020/05/04/face-masks-for-the-general-public.html>

Even when a person is alone, they create particles that contaminate surfaces and can remain airborne for more than 14 minutes ([Standnytskyi, et al., PNAS 2020](#)). Long experience in the medical field shows that mask wearing is safe for prolonged periods of time and while completing complex tasks.

15. A surgical mask or a similar face covering must be worn over the nose and mouth in hallways and other common areas (see item 20).

16. In labs, offices or other private areas, masks are required, whenever interpersonal distances of six feet or more cannot be maintained for a period of five minutes or more.
17. In labs, offices or other private areas, masks are recommended, but not required, at all times. However, everyone should be respectful of the concerns of their co-workers (see item 29).
18. People may use their own mask, if they prefer. However, the university is responsible for providing masks, if needed.
19. If special medical conditions or working conditions make mask wearing hazardous and it is impossible to maintain physical distancing, contact the Safety Committee to discuss alternative procedures.

Common areas and facilities

20. Common areas include hallways, conference rooms, bathrooms, the stockroom, public areas within the departmental facilities and centers, the copier and mail rooms, elevators, stairways and research areas typically used by three or more research groups.
21. The department will post maximum occupancy limits for common areas consistent with the need for distancing.
22. Users should wear masks within common areas, even if alone, to reduce the contamination of surfaces. After using an area, the user is responsible for disinfecting the surfaces in the areas that they occupied. The department will ensure that disinfecting supplies are available.
23. Eating and drinking on-site is allowed in designated areas to reduce employees' exposure to the general public. GSRC 101 will be configured for on-site eating during peak times, and the existing eating areas in GSRC may be used at any time. Masks may be removed for eating and drinking, but six-foot distancing between individuals must be maintained, and occupancy limits must be observed. Existing prohibitions on eating and drinking in areas with hazardous materials are still in effect.
24. The NMR laboratory, the mass spectroscopy facility and the stockroom will each develop and enforce policies to maintain distancing within these facilities.
25. People cannot congregate in the hallways or near common areas or facilities while waiting for space to open up.

Meetings

26. Meetings of more than three people must be conducted virtually.
27. Advising and office hours must be held virtually.

Hand washing/sanitizing

28. Everyone will wash or sanitize their hands upon (re-)entering a building. Frequent washing when moving between areas within the building is encouraged.

Stricter requirements

29. Anyone may ask their supervisor and co-workers to adopt stricter distancing practices in their presence. The supervisor and co-workers should cooperate to the extent practical.

Enforcement

These policies were developed and are maintained by the Return-to-Work committee, consisting of the department's Safety committee [Mark Berg (chair), Sakiru Abiodun, Wayne Outten, Perry Pellechia, Susan Richardson, Linda Shimizu, Natalia Shustova, Amy Taylor-Perry, and Dexter Thomas] and its Deployment Team [Ken Shimizu, Rachel Cooper, John Lavigne and Mark Berg].

30. Enforcement will emphasize education, mediation and adaptation to special circumstances. However, these policies are a requirement for employment and satisfactory degree progress. Flagrant, deliberate or repeated violations constitute unsatisfactory performance.
31. Questions, problems or disputes about these policies should be initially brought to the employee's supervisor or the chair of the Return-to-Work committee. The full Return-to-Work committee has the final authority to interpret these policies and to resolve any disputes regarding them.

Improvement

32. These procedures are under continual review. If you feel that they are not adequate for safety or unreasonably interfere with the performance of your duties, please contact a member of the Return-to-Work committee.