

RESEARCH TOWN HALL
May 18, 2020

#	Office	Questions
1	OVPR	<p>What will be the process for restarting research?</p> <p>Answer: The process will require approval by the OVPR to restart research programs. This approval requires research programs to develop safety plans specific to each lab or research area. Guidance on developing safety plans is posted on the OVPR website. In addition, everyone will need to complete an online COVID-19 safety training developed by Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) and keep a daily log of personnel working onsite. PPE necessary for general purposes related to COVID-19 or specific to the research area must be available and onsite prior to returning to the lab or work space.</p>
2	OVPR	<p>What is the timeline for OVPR approval for lab reopening?</p> <p>Answer: Submissions are being reviewed with a target of allowing labs and programs to reopen beginning May 20, 2020. The goal is to review incoming material and to ramp up our labs as safely as we can with an eye toward doing this over the course of days and weeks, and not weeks and months.</p>
3	OVPR	<p>If I did not hear back from the OVPR about my request to reopen my lab, could that mean my lab was determined to be low priority?</p> <p>Answer: No, we are moving through the approval process quickly and expeditiously. A dashboard on the OVPR website will provide information and updates on the process of submissions and approvals, as well as the status of individual submissions.</p>
4	OVPR	<p>Does each lab have to develop their own plan, or will there be one set of rules for all areas to follow? What guidance is available for how to maintain physical distancing in labs or offices?</p> <p>Answer: Yes, each lab needs to have a safety plan that is submitted to the OVPR and approved. The COVID-19 safety template provides suggestions and additional guidance that labs can use in developing the safety plan. We would also encourage that labs work together in developing their plans, particularly with graduate students and research personnel who are most directly involved in the work.</p>
5	OVPR	<p>Can safety plans include multiple PIs who share the same space?</p> <p>Answer: Yes, if there is shared space where a single safety plan can be used and makes sense. The development of the plan should be collaborative to make sure it addresses everyone's needs across all the shared space, including students and staff working in the space.</p>

6	OVPR	<p>Is it one safety plan for each lab, or does a safety plan need to be submitted for each Project?</p> <p>Answer: One safety plan for each lab or research program.</p>
7	OVPR	<p>Working at different field sites: Do I have to file a different safety plan for each field site?</p> <p>Answer: Where possible, one safety plan should be developed to cover all of the research program's activities.</p>
8	OVPR	<p>What training will be provided to ensure that students and staff who are returning to work are aware of new safety protocols?</p> <p>Answer: There is online training required and, as with the procedure for other safety plans, the requirement is that the individual reviews the safety plan and documents that they have read and understood it. The PI or their designee is responsible for confirming training before employees return to work and should retain a copy of the online training for each individual.</p>
9	OVPR	<p>Will grad student faculty advisors be given training for virtual/social distancing mentorship?</p> <p>Answer: The Returning to Research COVID-19 Safety Training is required for all individuals returning to the labs.</p>
10	OVPR	<p>What can areas do to maintain physical distancing?</p> <p>Answer: The COVID-19 Safety plan template has bullet points and suggestions for maintaining distancing, as do other resources on the OVPR website. Some options include shift scheduling and flex scheduling to allow physical distancing, staggered seating so that people are not sitting directly across from each other on lab benches, adding barriers or markers between work areas, and reducing maximum occupancy for shared or common area spaces.</p>
11	OVPR	<p>There will be times when physical distancing isn't possible. What should students and staff do in these situations?</p> <p>Answer: Where physical distancing is not an option, masks must be worn, hand washing before and after is required, and limit the amount of time in close contact. Based on the nature of research and contact, it might also require additional PPE or barriers, such as face shields or procedure gowns when conducting human subject research.</p>
12	OVPR	<p>I already had approval under the pilot/limited research process. Do I need to reapply for returning to normal operations.</p> <p>Answer: No. Labs that have approval under the pilot/limited research process should send an email to CRI@uconn.edu indicating they are going to apply their approved safety plan to resuming research. See the FAQ on the OVPR COVID-19 website.</p>

13	OVPR	<p>How are requests prioritized? Can work that's done outdoors or with minimal contact or staffing be given priority?</p> <p>Answer: Priorities are based on a number of factors, including how quickly the work can resume, degree of social distancing required, where labs are located and density in buildings, and whether or not the work requires specialized services or requirements. We are working to get labs re-opened safely, quickly, and expeditiously.</p>
14	OVPR	<p>Are electronic signatures okay for the PI signing of the daily lab log?</p> <p>Answer: No. Actual PI signatures (or the PI delegate) is required on the daily log. Review and approval of the daily logs must be at least weekly.</p>
15	OVPR	<p>What is the University doing to ensure enforcement with University guidelines and lab safety plans by those that return to campus?</p> <p>Answer: Safety plans will be enforced similar to other safety and compliance issues. The first level of enforcement rests with the PI. Building safety officers and EHS will also monitor compliance. Institutional expectations are that safety plans are followed, and noncompliance will be handled similarly to noncompliance of other serious policy infractions. There will be zero tolerance for noncompliance.</p>
16	OVPR	<p>How is UConn planning to enforce wearing the proper PPE?</p> <p>Answer: PIs need to set an example by wearing PPE and monitoring their research staff to ensure compliance. EHS and Building managers will be circulating the labs and checking on safety plans. Individuals who are not wearing PPE will not be granted access to labs. There will be zero tolerance for noncompliance.</p>
17	OVPR	<p>What does zero tolerance mean?</p> <p>Answer: If anyone enters the lab without wearing a mask, they will be sent home. Labs that are not following their safety plans will be subject to immediate sanctions, up to and including closure of the lab.</p> <p>Employees with concerns have 3 options. EH&S mailbox – EHS@uconn.edu for Storrs/regional campuses OVPR mailbox – OVPR@uconn.edu for all campuses University REPORTLINE – (888) 685-2637</p> <p>In the event of an emergency, individuals should call 911.</p>
18	OVPR	<p>Where are these weekly verification forms mentioned?</p> <p>Answer: A sample of the On Premises Personnel Log is available on the OVPR COVID-19 website. PIs or designees are required to review and sign the daily employee logs at least once a week.</p>

19	OVPR	<p>If you have a common entry point for multiple labs, and there is a central sign-in/sign-out sheet, can one sheet serve as the record for multiple labs/Pis?</p> <p>Answer: It is the PI's responsibility to ensure employees are following the safety plan for their lab and logging in and out. Shared labs can agree to coordinate and collaborate, but the safety plan should state this and explain how this sharing of the oversight of the lab will work.</p>
20	OVPR	<p>What health screening measures are being adopted to ensure the safety of researchers who return to the lab?</p> <p>Answer: The Research Ramp Up Preparedness Guide provides guidance on screening which includes self-monitoring for COVID-19 symptoms or contact with infected individuals, with direction on when to stay home. Each research lab is required to maintain an On Premises Personnel Log to screen for health status each day.</p>
21	OVPR	<p>Will research cores be open by May 20?</p> <p>Answer: Yes. Cores are getting ready and running. Each facility will have a safety plan to ensure the safety of the core staff and users. Users are asked to contact cores directly to ensure the core is able to meet their needs. Cores will continue to evaluate volume and adjust staff accordingly. Cores are under the same guidance as labs regarding maintaining a safe work environment.</p>
22	OVPR	<p>How are core facilities with shared lab spaces going to be able to operate?</p> <p>Answer: Core facilities have their own safety plans to allow for social distancing and to ensure they have sufficient personnel available. Pis should contact the individual core facility, as most require scheduling of services and are not running general hours of operation.</p>
23	OVPR	<p>When will human subjects and clinical research be able to resume?</p> <p>Answer: Specific guidance for restarting human subjects research that is not a therapeutic clinical trial is being developed. That guidance should be posted on the OVPR website by May 25, 2020.</p>
24	OVPR	<p>Will the same procedure developed for labs be used to determine the opening of studio spaces?</p> <p>Answer: The OVPR is working with the School of Fine Arts to address the unique needs of the school and will issue guidance.</p>
25	OVPR	<p>Are there any restrictions on accessing the animal tower at certain times?</p> <p>Answer: The animal town does not restrict hours of access. The hours are posted.</p>
26	OVPR	<p>Seasonality of some research will result in brief windows of opportunity. What is being done to mitigate these losses?</p> <p>Answer: Seasonality will be one of the factors considered in prioritizing the re-opening of research labs.</p>

27	OVPR	<p>Are you requiring departmental approval before the OVPR plans are approved per PI?</p> <p>Answer: No. The OVPR does not require departmental approval of safety plans.</p>
28	OVPR	<p>Data analysis that is not lab-dependent should continue to be done remotely/online, is that correct?</p> <p>Answer: Yes. Employees are encouraged to work remotely to the fullest extent possible.</p>
29	OVPR & President	<p>The pandemic is putting a financial strain on the University and PIs who have seen their grant balances drained. What is the University doing to seek state or federal relief?</p> <p>Answer: The University's Office of Government Relations, Office of the President, and OVPR have been working with congressional leaders to encourage agencies to adopt greater flexibility and provide supplemental funding/cost extensions, as well as recovery funding for the additional costs incurred to shut down and restart research. We have been working very hard with our congressional representatives to help pass the HEROES Act, which includes \$90 billion for higher education. It has gone to the Senate which has not taken it up at this time but has indicated the need.</p>
30	OVPR	<p>When will undergraduates be allowed to return to research programs?</p> <p>Answer: At this time, undergraduates are not permitted to be involved in research activities that require in-person research or on-campus/field research. As a phased process, priority will be given to restarting faculty and graduate students research programs, and undergraduates will be phased in at a later date.</p>
31	OVPR	<p>Has the IRB process for amendments, online consent forms, or online data collection tools changed?</p> <p>Answer: No. There are no changes to the IRB process.</p>
32	OVPR	<p>What if our PI is older and does not want to come in? Does this mean no grad students can be approved to come in to work?</p> <p>Answer: If a PI feels they are in a situation where it would not be appropriate for them to come in, they should work with HR on their individual situation. In terms of verification of the employee logs, they would need to identify a delegate to serve in that role on their behalf. There needs to be clear delegation of someone who will take on the responsibility of verification and safety monitoring.</p>

33	OVPR	<p>What are sponsor expectations for annual reports or requests for extensions?</p> <p>Answer: Links to federal sponsor specific guidance are available on the OVPR COVID- 19 website.</p> <p>In general, sponsors expect to be informed of impacts to the research progress due to COVID-19 as part of progress reports. NIH recently stated that the IC needs to be notified in event that there will be idle pay charged to a project. Additional guidance on this will be forthcoming from Sponsored Programs.</p> <p>The OVPR is in conversation with peers and sponsors to promote the need for administrative flexibility. Most federal sponsors will grant up to 1 year NCEs when requested for delays caused by COVID-19.</p>
34	OVPR	<p>When do I need to submit my proposal to SPS for review and submission?</p> <p>Answer: Proposals are due to SPS five business days before the sponsor deadline. No later than 48 hours (or 9am the day before, for a 5:00pm submission deadline). Final Science is due to complete the proposal at least 4 hours before the deadline.</p> <p>Late proposals will not be prioritized over other proposals for review and submission to meet the deadline.</p>
35	OVPR	<p>Is there any guidance to help PIs who are at the mercy of individual companies for funding or extensions?</p> <p>Answer: Yes. Sponsored Programs Services will assist faculty in interfacing with companies to request extensions and requests for additional funding. Please contact the contracts team at SPS or Director Mark Reeves for assistance.</p>
36	OVPR	<p>Animal research needs and the high costs of maintaining unique strains of mice/other lines (even as research has stalled), plus additional costs of re-breeding animals, are unanticipated costs. Are these costs chargeable to grants?</p> <p>Answer: Yes, under OMB guidance as adopted by federal sponsors.</p>
37	OVPR	<p>More guidance on specific safety measures would be helpful. The current guidelines suggest personnel density, protective equipment, and disinfection protocols should be “consistent with federal and state guidelines and directives.” It would be good to have links that describe that in more detail in one place.</p> <p>Answer: Excellent suggestion. The OVPR posted an FAQ where you can find links to state and CDC safety guidelines.</p>

38	OVPR	<p>Can PPE, forehead thermometers, COVID tests, etc. be charged to a federal grant?</p> <p>Answer: COVID-19 general use PPE - which consists of masks, disinfectant, hand sanitizer, and gloves for use with disinfectant - should be consider similar to office supplies and should not be charged to the grant. At this time, these supplies are being provided by and paid for by the institution. PPE that was needed for research before the pandemic is still needed and - if different than the COVID-19 general use PPE - is chargeable to the grant. See UCH guidelines for PPE at UCH, and Storrs guidelines for PPE at Storrs and the regional campuses.</p>
39	OVPR	<p>Do all these policies apply to the companies in the Technology Incubator Program?</p> <p>Answer: Yes. TIP companies are expected to follow the University requirements for shared space, and for University space in which their employees might need to work. Safety plans developed for their companies must be submitted to the OVPR for approval.</p>
40	Executive Vice President/ Public Safety	<p>Will there be free on campus COVID-19 testing available for students, faculty, and staff?</p> <p>Answer: Currently, the Governor’s reopening guidelines do not require testing for any of the businesses associated with Phase 1 reopening, which includes University Research Programs.</p>
41	Executive Vice President	<p>Did any departments or labs donate PPE supplies to hospitals?</p> <p>Answer: Yes. A number of departments and labs donated PPE and other supplies to UConn Health. In addition, faculty have produced and donated hand sanitizer and 3D printed face shields.</p>
42	President	<p>Will the University provide PPE for labs?</p> <p>Answer: General PPE for COVID-19 will be provided by the University, such as face coverings or masks, and cleaning/disinfecting products. The lab will be responsible for obtaining research-specific PPE, as was the case prior to COVID-19. In those cases where research-specific PPE may be in short supply, the University is fully committed to work with labs and bring the full force to bear of its procurement engine to assist faculty and PIs in securing supplies needed to open safely.</p>
43	Facilities	<p>What is the process for obtaining PPE from the University?</p> <p>Answer: UConn Health researchers can find guidance on this subject by visiting Guidance on UConn Health General Use PPE for Research. For Storrs and regional campuses, please see 2020-05-19 Covid-19-Related Protections: Storrs, Regionals, and Ag Extensions.</p>
44		<p>How do we request PPE if we have a research lab at the regionals?</p> <p>Answer: We will send masks to the building managers at the regional campuses. All other PPE necessary for your science will be purchased or procured the same way as normal.</p>

45	Facilities	<p>What is the cleaning schedule and waste disposal protocol? Who is responsible, and what is the availability of cleaning supplies?</p> <p>Answer: The cleaning schedule will be twice a day. We will be doing extra cleanings to touch points, disinfecting touch points, door handles, push buttons, and the like. That also includes bathrooms, and trash will be removed once a day.</p>
46	Facilities	<p>What is the schedule for bathroom cleaning? How will people know when the bathroom was last cleaned? What is the protocol for using the bathroom?</p> <p>Answer: The bathrooms will also be cleaned and disinfected twice a day. We are looking at two different options for notifying people when we clean. One will be technology - a QR code to be put on the wall which we can scan to have some kind of notification go out via technology. The other is a very simple and older technology - we may just put a little whiteboard in the room and write the time. Both of those are being evaluated right now.</p>
47	Facilities	<p>Do all the protocols discussed here (cleaning etc.) apply to SFA Departmental Studios - particularly Art Dept Studios: Art Building, Bishop, Art Ceramic Studio, Kirby Mill, etc.?</p> <p>Answer: SFA should follow the same CDC and FDA recommended guidelines for cleaning and disinfection of general areas. Facilities will similarly service these buildings as they open. However, SFA should follow existing requirements for use of PPE and cleaning/disinfection protocols specific to the work space. For instance, clothing face coverings or procedural masks may not be sufficient for some work or spaces.</p>
48	Executive Vice President	<p>What is the university doing to make sure buildings and labs are ready for students and staff to return to work? Are vendors engaged in the back-to-work plan also?</p> <p>Answer: EHS has started safety inspections of research areas in anticipation of the ramping up of research. Storrs and Regionals Facilities are ready for research ramp-up. Storrs and Regionals Facilities Operations will increase disinfection of touch points and continue regular service in areas that have been approved by OVPR to return for research purposes.</p> <p>Contractors and vendors are required to follow the same guidelines as university staff.</p>
49	Executive Vice President	<p>What is the current policy for visitors to research labs, such as someone to repair or maintain instruments?</p> <p>Answer: Our policy has not changed. There are facilities operations and maintenance happening now, and we have protocols in place for vendors to maintain social distancing. Visitors will be expected to follow the same safety guidance as our staff and research personnel.</p>
50	Facilities	<p>Can we prop open doors open where there are no touchless options for opening them?</p> <p>Answer: Some doors cannot be propped for fire code, life safety, and lab safety reasons. Questions on whether a door can be propped open should be directed to Public Safety and Facilities.</p>

51	Facilities	<p>Who is in charge of improving air-filtration and ventilation systems in all buildings, with frequent maintenance schedule?</p> <p>Answer: Air filtration in labs at Storrs and Regional campuses deliver 100% outside air. Non-lab spaces, such as offices, have recirculated air with no more than 80% of the volume returned, mixed with outside air (20% volume minimum), and filtered through high quality filters. In preparation for re-entry, Facilities is planning to increase outside air beyond these minimums.</p>
52	Executive Vice President	<p>What is the frequency and availability of campus bus service?</p> <p>Answer: We are currently running the weekend schedule and will ramp up as demand dictates.</p>
53	EHS/HR	<p>I have a medical situation that prevents me from wearing a mask or face covering, and I am not able to do my work from home. Are there any requirements or guidelines for those unable to wear a mask?</p> <p>Answer: <u>Every occupant of research labs must wear a mask.</u> If you are unable to wear a mask, you will not be allowed in the lab, nor will you be allowed in the building per State of CT rules. Individuals who are unable to wear a mask should contact HR for accommodations. HR is ready and poised to assist those employees.</p>
54		<p>Can someone address if/when campus will determine “mask-required” zones within UConn buildings, or is six feet all we need?</p> <p>Answer: The default is a mask or face covering. The purpose of the face covering is to protect others. Even if you are alone in a space, you may shed respiratory droplets, meaning that surface is impacted and could affect someone else who enters the space after you leave. Masks can be removed if you are in a private office or private workstation with walls where other people would not be entering. Otherwise, the default is to always wear a mask or face covering.</p>
55	Executive Vice President	<p>There are people entering campus without proper PPE. How will this be controlled?</p> <p>Answer: PIs will be responsible for ensuring members of their lab comply with the safety protocols. EHS, OVPR, and Building Safety Officers will monitor compliance with safety protocols. Anyone entering a campus building, including visitors, contractors, or vendors, will be required to follow the safety guidance the same as university staff.</p>
56	Human Resources	<p>What should I do if someone in my lab tests positive for COVID-19?</p> <p>Answer: HR has provided guidance on situations involving an employee who tests positive for COVID-19. This guidance can be found on the HR COVID-19 website.</p>
57	Human Resources	<p>I have special health concerns. Will there be flexibility about my returning to work?</p> <p>Answer: Yes. HR has posted guidance on this on the HR COVID-19 website.</p>
58	Human Resources	<p>Lack of child-care and school closures challenge researchers at all levels with children at home. Will there be flexibility regarding these issues?</p> <p>Answer: Yes. HR has posted guidance on this on the HR COVID-19 website.</p>

59	Graduate School	<p>Many GAs need to be in the lab to do most of their work, and they may not feel comfortable returning yet or may be feeling pressured to return by their PI. What should GAs who have these concerns do?</p> <p>Answer: If you feel pressured to return to work, you may contact the Graduate School (gradschool@uconn.edu) to seek advice. You may also consult with the Ombuds Office at (860) 486-5143 for Storrs and regional campuses and at (860) 679-5061 for UCH.</p>
60	Graduate School	<p>I am a GA. Who should I contact if I have concerns about safety policies and procedures not being followed by my PI?</p> <p>Answer: The Graduate School can provide advice and will work with graduate students and supervisors to find a mutually acceptable approach, if possible. The Graduate School will protect the identity of graduate students to the extent possible, but confidential concerns will be more difficult to address. Students who are particularly concerned about revealing their identity should consider working through the Ombuds Office.</p> <p>Safety concerns can also be reported the following ways: EH&S mailbox – EHS@uconn.edu for Storrs/regional campuses OVPR mailbox – OVPR@uconn.edu for all campuses University REPORTLINE – (888) 685-2637</p>