

WORKING SAFELY IN THE LABS DURING CORONAVIRUS

If you still have concerns after reading this guidance, please discuss these initially with your line manager, supervisor or the Laboratory Manager where you will be working. The team in HR or the Directorate, Rich Abell as the employee representative for health and safety, or Chris Clay as the Safety Health and Environment Advisor will be able to consider and address any concerns that remain outstanding.

SAMS' position

It has been SAMS' position throughout the pandemic to protect the health of our staff and students and those who may be affected by what we do. We have been continually informed by Government guidance. SAMS' objective during current lockdown restrictions is to enable key activities to continue in the laboratories while ensuring that we continue to protect health and work to at least the rules and guidance issued by the Scottish Government. We will take a risk-based approach, based around key control measures, many of which will be familiar to you already.

General precautions

It is important that, where possible, staff and students **continue to work from home. Only laboratory activities that are deemed to be essential and critical should continue*** (see below for definition).

Where you consider it is important that your lab activities take, please **contact the Laboratory Manager** before you return to the lab. They will need to tell you about additional measures that you need to take in the lab above what is normally expected. You do not routinely need to contact Directorate about your intentions.

It is very important that physical distancing of 2m is maintained. If the 2m distance is to be broken, this must be for an essential activity that cannot be performed in another manner, a face covering must be worn and contact time minimised.

The Laboratory Managers have identified workstations considered suitable to use which maintain this working distance. There will be an online booking system for you to book a workstation based on MS Outlook: please be considerate and only book what you absolutely need. This will include fume cupboards etc. Some workstations and fume cupboards may be temporarily marked as not for use to ensure we can maintain appropriate distancing.

Please do not exceed maximum occupancy numbers for each laboratory.

There may be additional floor markings and signage to guide you with social distancing. It is important that you respect this to protect you and your colleagues.

It is essential that **good hygiene** is maintained. Please continue to regularly wash your hands for at least 20 seconds and at least when you start work in the lab, and when you are leaving the lab.

You are **expected to decontaminate your workstation** BEFORE and AFTER your work. This will include the bench surface, shared equipment associated with that workstation such as pipettes, fume cupboard surfaces (particularly the sash), keyboards and other input devices and other common touch points. You will be further advised of additional touch points to consider by Lab Managers.

Generally, a 70% alcohol wash bottle and disposable towels will be available to do this. Please be sparing with the alcohol to avoid a fire risk and note that some equipment, particularly that associated with nearby hot surfaces or potentially exposed electrics, and microscope eye pieces, will not be suitable for alcohol disinfection. You will be advised of this and you may be required to wear disposable gloves in these instances which you remove IMMEDIATELY after using the equipment. In some isolated cases, it may be that equipment needs to be left redundant for 72 hours to allow potential virus contamination to be naturally inactivated.

There may be shared resources across labs that you normally have access to, like autoclaves or deionised water. Part of our control strategy is to try and **remove unnecessary movement between areas**. Therefore, if you need to access these resources outside of your 'allotted' lab area, please inform the Laboratory Manager. Similarly, try to plan your work so that you ensure you have all necessary reagents etc available to you to avoid moving between spaces.

If you need to bring samples into the lab, please discuss this first with the Laboratory Manager who will advise you of potential disinfection steps needed.

In some instances, notably with the laminar flow cabinets in the Microbiology laboratory, a physical shield has been installed to separate users. Please ensure that the shield is wiped down with 70% alcohol before and after use.

Finally, a note on PPE. It is important that the measures we use to try and control the virus **do not rely unnecessarily on the use PPE**. The measures indicated above adopt this principle. There may be instances where we have to rely to the use of face coverings but we anticipate these will be very limited and they should be discussed with Chris Clay. Of course, the PPE that you would use normally MUST still be used.

***Defining an 'essential activity'**

Essential and critical work in laboratories and research facilities are defined in guidance issued by the Scottish Government.

It includes work that:

- Cannot be delayed until the protection level for the area is lowered;
- Cannot be carried out at home or outdoors;
- Is safe for the people involved

and (as related to SAMS):

- Any indoor activity that is needed to enable or support outdoor experiments, surveying, sampling, field trials or other field work;
- Any activity on long-term experiments, surveys, analysis or trials, the disruption or delay of which would have long-term negative research impacts that could not be easily undone at a later stage;
- Any work carried out by a postgraduate student, research student, apprentice or trainee, the disruption or delay of which would delay or endanger obtaining their degree or certification
- Any activity needed to look after living organisms or parts thereof on-site, or any other type of collection, machinery or other resource that needs regular attention on-site, or any other activity needed to safeguard health & safety or animal welfare on-site
- Any short term activity (such as testing, analysis, short experiments) that contributes to protecting, supporting or enabling any of the following:
 - National security

- National critical infrastructure
- Any other official process, investigation or certification
- Biosecurity, plant health or animal health & welfare
- Food security or food safety
- Environmental protection
- International trade
- Manufacturing industries
- A legal or statutory duty
- Any activity to support the above.

What SAMS needs from you

This guidance **relies completely on you** to align with new ways of working. Please also follow the Laboratory Manager's guidance and instruction.

If you have any concerns, new ideas or other thoughts, speak up and share them. These are unprecedented times and procedures should continually evolve.

As always, we also anticipate you will support your colleagues. If you see something wrong, share responsibility for it. Advise your colleagues if they are unsure of what they are doing, or do not quite seem to be working in line with others.

Summary

- Consider if it is necessary to complete your laboratory work at this time. Stay at home otherwise.
- Follow the Laboratory Manager's guidance and instruction
- Maintain social distancing as far as you reasonably can
- Always employ good hygiene, including disinfection of your workstation
- Plan your work, and think about resources outside of your allotted work space
- Commit to a new way of working

END