



SOM Update on Critical and Essential Research Planning Guidance

as of May 14, 2020

The School of Medicine (SOM) leadership aims to safely and efficiently expand on critical and essential research. Our guiding principle continues to be to mitigate health and safety risks to our employees, students, and research participants based on the advice of healthcare professionals and other experts. While we hope to move forward with research expansion and bring more researchers to campus as soon as it is safe, we also recognize that due to the uncertain trajectories of the COVID-19 epidemic, we may need to slow or pause this process if the situation dictates.

This document is intended to provide guidance to SOM researchers as they develop plans to support the updated definition of critical and essential research, and it is designed to be consistent with and supplement guidance provided by the University.

For research taking place in clinical facilities, SOM researchers are expected to follow all guidance and requirements as outlined by facility where the research is taking place. For reference, see below:

- [Emory Healthcare \(Login Required\)](#)
- [Grady Health System \(Login Required\)](#)
- [Atlanta VA Health System](#)
- [Children's Healthcare of Atlanta](#)

Update on Critical and Essential Research

Our goal is to allow for the gradual, monitored re-engagement of onsite research in order to support highly prioritized, time-sensitive research programs and protocol. Research that meets the definition of Critical and Essential research includes:

- all COVID-19 and other approved research already reviewed and approved as critical and essential during the 'ramp-down' phase;
- research that is necessary to achieve progress in meeting time-sensitive milestones for extramurally funded research (eg, NIH, NSF, foundations);
- research that is necessary to generate data to revise/complete manuscripts and obtain preliminary data for extramural grant applications; and
- core and other shared resources necessary to complete research described above.

Timeline

The SOM will determine the timeline for implementing the updated definition of critical and essential research.



Researcher Guidance

All research teams should review these guidelines and respond via the electronic form (Appendix A) for review and approval of plans using the updated definition of critical and essential research. All investigators will be required to submit the form for approval. Investigators working in non-SOM space (eg. Yerkes, Grady, EHC, Winship, Georgia Tech, etc) will be expected to coordinate the appropriate approvals and follow guidelines required at those entities as well.

Revised operational plans must address the researcher guidance detailed below in order to provide the safest work environment possible. Reducing the density of personnel in our research facilities is essential to providing a safe environment. **It is expected that all research teams will follow social distancing practices determined by the University and require the use of face masks on campus.** The current guidance for social distancing requires a **minimum of 6 ft spacing between any two individuals at any given time.** Additional guidance for achieving the spacing requirement in the laboratory setting is provided below. Recognizing that research comes in many forms, we recommend the following:

- A. Computational Research:** Continue to work remotely for as long or as much as possible with minimal onsite work.
 - a. For research that needs to be conducted onsite; social distancing guidelines will be maintained
- B. Clinical Trials:** Continue to work remotely for as long and as much as possible with minimal onsite work. Clinical facilities (Emory Healthcare and/or partner sites) will determine when non-essential staff may re-engage with onsite work.
 - a. For research that needs to interact with human subjects, priority will be given to interventional clinical trials;
- C. Clinical Research:** Continue to work remotely for as long and as much as possible with minimal onsite work. Additional guidelines provided below:
 - a. Research previously approved as Critical and Essential may continue;
 - b. Work that can be performed from home should continue to be performed from home until the University's social distancing guidelines are relaxed;
 - c. For clinical research with human subjects, PI should be guided by risk/benefits and safety of participants and staff, the IRB, sponsors, and their department leadership to get approval to reopen the study. If proceeding, researchers must follow infection control rules and testing requirements as determined by the clinical partner space (Emory Healthcare and/or other partner sites) in which the research is performed;
 - d. If research is conducted in Emory Healthcare space, PI must defer to clinical facilities manager to determine when non-essential staff may re-enter;
 - e. In University space, researchers will follow all SOM guidance (PPE, social distancing, disinfecting, etc.);
 - f. Do not hold subjects in waiting areas. Instruct all subjects to follow social distancing guidelines provided. Ensure that subjects have appropriate face masks to wear prior to entering the facility;
 - g. Evaluate subjects in individual rooms rather than shared spaces; and
 - h. If staff are located in cubicles or other open space, cumulative number of staff may not exceed one staff member per 250 sq ft.



D. Experimental (wet lab / animal) Research / Laboratory-based Research:

- a. PIs will ensure sufficient space to allow for social distancing. The current guidance for social distancing requires a **minimum of at least 6 ft spacing between any two individuals at any given time**. Additional guidance for achieving the spacing requirement in the laboratory setting is provided below.
- b. For experimental / laboratory-based research, on site operations will resume in a phased approach. Additional expansion of laboratories beyond the maximum occupancy as outlined in Stage 1 (below) will be determined by ongoing University and SOM guidance:

Stage 1
<p>SOM will restrict the number of people in each lab at a given time to ensure social distancing can be safely practiced within the main lab area at any given time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diagrams for each SOM building and floor illustrating absolute occupancy constraints will be developed for each department and distributed to Department Chairs and Administrators (see Appendix B, for example).• To achieve social distancing, absolute occupancy per lab will be based on the requirement that a minimum of 250 sq ft must be available per person in any given laboratory space to allow for the ability to move safely within the lab environment.• Department Chairs will be engaged where PIs need guidance to obtain consensus.• SOM Office of Research can be leveraged where additional concerns arise.

- c. Flexible scheduling can be utilized to increase total number of staff working, provided that main lab area maximum occupancy is never exceeded at any given time.
- d. All persons currently working in laboratories as essential personnel must follow the published SOM and EHSO guidelines regarding safety, cleaning, and social distancing.
- e. Labs will be responsible for remaining within the designated maximum levels for number of personnel.
- f. For investigators in multi-investigator environments, coordination with all the labs in the open suite/environment should occur to ensure that the personnel density is sufficient for social distancing.
- g. Lab offices and workstations are included in this update and should not exceed the allowed number of personnel outlined above (minimum of 250 sq ft must be available per person in any given laboratory space).
- h. In select circumstances when social distancing guidelines cannot be maintained, (eg, when an experimental condition requires close contact of two or more lab members for a procedure, animal surgery, or other purpose), researchers must follow additional infection control guidelines, per EHSO.



Guidelines on Trainees and Volunteers

- A. **SOM postdoctoral fellows** - will be considered part of the work force allowed to return per these guidelines.
- B. **Graduate Students working in SOM Labs** - will follow guidelines implemented by LGS (<http://www.graduateschool.emory.edu/coronavirus>), as well as these SOM guidelines.
- C. **SOM Visiting Fellows and Visiting Scholars** – will follow the guidelines of the SOM.
- D. **Visiting Medical Student Research Program** - report to G. Churchward (Gordon.churchward@emory.edu) for additional information.
- E. **ECAS Undergraduates** - will be prohibited from SOM laboratories until guidance is provided by ECAS (<https://www.emory.edu/coronavirus/emory/students>).
- F. **Volunteers, high school students, unpaid interns, or other non-degree individuals** - will not be allowed into SOM laboratories. Exceptions may be granted at the SOM level upon written request.

Guidelines on external Visitors and Collaborators

In Stage 1, **visitors** are generally not allowed. Exceptions (i.e., clinical trial monitors) may be requested through the department Chair or their designee. If approved, all requirements for Stage 1 Guidance (social distancing, PPE, etc) are required to be in place and followed.

Guidelines for Core and DAR Services

A. Division of Animal Resources (DAR)

- a. It is expected that current “essential” personnel and re-engaged personnel will read, agree to, and follow the DAR specific guidelines.
- b. DAR access may be limited in order to comply with researcher density and social distancing requirements promulgated by the SOM and University. Social distancing policies must be adhered to in the animal resource facility.
- c. Scheduling access for animal room and procedure room use is required. An electronic method of scheduling is being developed. Scheduling access will allow maximum use of space by investigators, animal care technicians, and vets.
- d. PPE: Masks are required at all times in DAR spaces. As per previous practice, street clothes must be covered when entering animal rooms and gloves must be worn when handling animals or cages.
- e. Disinfecting work surfaces prior and after use, as well as hand washing must be done in accordance with DAR guidelines.

B. University Cores

- a. Access to core facilities and equipment may be limited in order to comply with researcher density and social distancing requirements promulgated by the SOM and University. Social distancing policies must be adhered to in core facilities.
- b. Investigators will need to contact core directors / staff to schedule projects and access to equipment in the core facilities.
- c. Disinfection work surfaces and equipment prior and after use must be accomplished using guidelines provided by individual core facilities.



Appendix A. Critical and Essential Research Planner – Electronic Form

- **This form is intended to capture the next stage of research activity on campus. We request that all faculty with research FTE complete this form.**
 - **Your plan will be reviewed and approved by your Department Leadership. Additional review by the School of Medicine may also be required.**
 - **You will be contacted once appropriate preparations have been made to return to campus for this next phase of research re-engagement.**
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Question – At this time does your research meet this definition? Yes / No

Question – Will your research require you to physically be on campus? Yes / No

Question – PIs will be asked to develop a social distancing plan for each research space/lab

- The PI is responsible for overseeing that proper social distancing and that the use of face masks is maintained at all times in the laboratory environment.
- The current guidance for social distancing requires **a minimum of 6 ft spacing between any two individuals at any given time.**
- For cubicle or other open space, cumulative number of staff **may not exceed one staff per 250 sq ft.**
- For Lab research:
 - School of Medicine floor plans (see Appendix B) demarcated with social distancing circles will be provided to assist in determining the maximum occupancy allowed at any given time.
 - To achieve social distancing, absolute occupancy per lab is based on the metric that **a minimum of 250 sq ft must be available per person in any given laboratory space to allow for the ability to move safely within the lab environment.**

Important Note: clinical facilities and partner sites (eg Yerkes, Grady, Emory Healthcare, Winship,

Question – PIs will be asked to develop a density management plan for each research space/lab

Social distancing may be managed utilizing several methodologies, including through shift plans.

- Please identify all members of your research team (including yourself) that will be onsite
 - For each lab member, please describe your plan to manage occupancy (set shifts, flexible shifts, overnight, etc)
 - For each employee, identify what your plan is to control density within your research space
 - Note: Graduate students should also be included in this list for planning purposes
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Question – PIs will be asked to provide information regarding PPE needs



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Appendix B. – Floor Maps to be provided for Wet lab / experimental research lab space for planning purposes

To achieve social distancing, absolute occupancy per lab is based on the metric that a minimum of 250 sq ft must be available per person in any given laboratory space.

