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Physical Distancing Guidelines for ISU Laboratories

Introduction

Physical distancing (six feet/two meters) during this period of community transmission of COVID-19 can be challenging for laboratories, given that researchers might not have dedicated workspaces and may have to use shared equipment. This document is therefore meant to provide general guidance on achieving physical distancing measures in the laboratory/workshop. These examples are non-exhaustive and we encourage you to share your best practices with your safety committee, your department, and EH&S.

Photo examples from NUS guidance are included for reference.

- Assume that any person you come into contact with could be an asymptomatic carrier of COVID-19.
- Per the recommendations of the CDC and government mandates, maintaining six feet of physical distancing is important to reduce the risks of transmitting COVID-19.
- Appropriate face coverings should be worn whenever six feet of distance cannot be mainatained.
- Principal Investigators are responsible for adapting risk reduction strategies to minimize the transmission of COVID-19 in their laboratories and work spaces. This document provides guidance and examples to assist with that goal.

Methods

Achieve distancing of six feet between researchers:

- Move or label chairs and desks in laboratories and offices to alert and remind researchers of their proximity to others. Paperwork and computer work may need to be moved to alternate locations to avoid proximity.
- Use tape/markings to denote six feet of separation on workbenches, around instruments and equipment, storage areas, fume hoods, biosafety cabinets, etc. in the laboratory.
- If workers sit or stand back-to-back, stagger their placement by closing down alternating workspaces on each bench.
- If possible, designate specific doors for entry and exit.
- Assign workers to specific tasks that can be completed in specified areas to assist in limiting their movement throughout the laboratory.
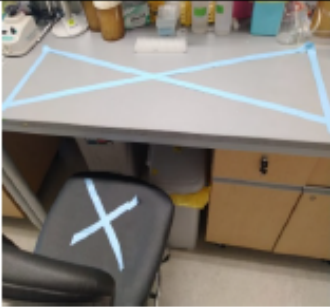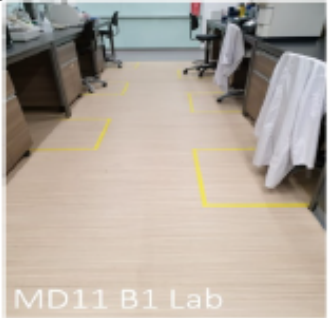
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Minimize contact time:

- Create a rotating schedule for workers, such that lab and office space is utilized efficiently, while observing physical distancing (six feet apart) and ensuring that no one works alone in the laboratory. Allow time for cleaning and disinfecting at the end of each shift.
- Implement a schedule or reservation system for shared equipment and workspaces, with time between users to clean and disinfect the workstation after use.

Minimize possible exposure:

- DO NOT COME TO WORK IF YOU FEEL ILL. CONTACT YOUR SUPERVISOR.
- If possible, assign work areas to specific workers; each worker should only use their assigned area(s).
- When possible, designate PPE to be used by a specific worker.
- Wash hands with soap and water before and after entering the laboratory, as well as frequently during office work. If gloves are removed during laboratory work, wash hands before donning a new pair.
- Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces in work areas and offices – door handles, sink areas, etc.
- Workers should clean and disinfect all shared workstations and materials when they have completed their work. This includes any surface they touch that may be touched by others (cabinet handles, tools, door handles, computers, instruments, etc.)
- Shared computers – utilize keyboard covers which can be cleaned and disinfected after use. Otherwise, clean with cloth and disinfectant (at least 60% alcohol) or a disinfectant wipe that is safe for keyboard use.
- If six feet of distancing is not possible for some tasks, complete the task with as much distance as is feasible. Work as quickly as possible, while maintaining safety standards and following standard operating procedures.

Examples courtesy of National University of Singapore (NUS)

Workstation labels and Floor Markings	
Labels for out-of-bound bench area and chair	Floor labels where users should work
Floor labels for chairs / standing work	Floor labels for waiting when another user is at the shelf
Floor label indicating that others should not enter if someone is inside	Floor labels to indicate separate work areas
Floor label to indicate working positions	Floor labels to indicate waiting area