March 13, 2020

Research colleagues,

As you know, the COVID-19 outbreak has presented us with significant challenges and Northwestern has provided guidance to ensure the safety of our community while offering the least disruption to our work. I encourage you to bookmark and review that website as well as the University’s Frequently Asked Questions, which will be continually updated in response to additional information and developments.

I now write to augment that guidance with important considerations that are specific to our research enterprise.

As we continue to respond to the challenges of COVID-19, our goal is to ensure the safety of our staff and researchers. We also aim to keep our facilities continuously functioning to support critical research -- even in the event of staffing reductions related to COVID-19. We recognize that some members of our staff have questions about alternate work arrangements. We will continue to closely monitor ongoing developments and will provide further guidance as warranted. You can find additional information below and on the linked pages.

**Guidance:**

- **Prepare to slow research activities in your group.** Progression of the COVID-19 outbreak may result in staff shortages or a shut-down of our research activities. You should meet with your group to develop an emergency plan for how you will manage a decreased or paused research operation. Examples of how investigators can help:
  - Identify critical equipment that must remain in service, such as glove boxes and cryopreservation, then plan for how to manage or shut down this equipment if necessary.
  - Strive to keep all lab activities within reasonable business hours -- including those involving work with hazardous material or processes. Doing so enhances the ability of Research Safety to respond if services are needed.
  - Continue or expand cross-training among your staff to support critical functions.
• **Stay informed and review industry best practices.** To help ensure the safety of individuals and the continuity of your research, consult Research Safety's [guidance](#) and review the following preparedness checklist:
  - Identify personnel who are essential to maintain critical research and ensure they know what to do if operations are interrupted or suspended.
  - Distribute your communications plan to lab personnel. If necessary, develop this plan and designate contacts to help disseminate information in a timely manner.
  - Identify priorities and plan for critical experiments in case of limited access. Take steps to ensure remote access to files, data, servers, etc., except with regard to research with sensitive or restricted data.
  - Personnel should not remove research materials other than laptops, data storage devices, etc. to alternative locations, including home. Research must be conducted within appropriate space designated for research activities.
  - Plan for remote proposal submission.
  - Be sure to check travel restrictions in advance of making travel plans.

• **Follow guidance regarding animal research.** Please review the specific communications directed from the Center for Comparative Medicine (CCM) regarding animal research. CCM communications will be delivered through AOPs.
  - Remain aware of disaster planning [resources and guidance](#) from the NIH Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare.
  - Check the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) Office website for updates on meetings, protocol submission, and submission processing.

• **Follow guidance regarding human participant research.** Access updates on the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office website, including [information](#) related to COVID-19.

• **Institutional Biosafety Committee.** Updates on meetings, protocol submission, and processing will be posted on the IBC website. We
expect that the Biosafety Office will be able to process IBC registrations and amendments, even if personnel are working remotely. Contact researchsafety@northwestern.edu with any questions.

- **Follow guidelines from Core Facilities.** Several cores have disseminated guidance to their users regarding health and safety within these shared facilities.

- **Stay up to date on guidance regarding sponsored research administration.** The Sponsored Research website posts the most current information available from federal agencies and other sources.

I also encourage you, where appropriate, to review the mechanisms used to identify and safeguard cell lines and animal strains vital to your work. Please remember that the COVID-19 outbreak remains a fluid situation: circumstances can shift quickly, resulting in updates to our guidance. The Office for Research is working closely with other University stakeholders to monitor the situation and will keep you informed of any significant developments impacting the research enterprise.

I thank you for your partnership and efforts as we work together to meet these challenges while keeping our community safe and our research protected.

**Milan Mrksich**

*Interim Vice President for Research*