

THE Good Practice Sessions

Session 2: Wednesday 27th May 2020, 1pm

Plan: Weekly meetings held on Wednesdays 1-2pm (1hr sessions)

On a weekly basis so that people can become familiar with when the sessions are and can drop in and out of these as much as they want to (or can do).

1-hour sessions to be adhered to, so that the sessions do not take as much time up for those who have other work and priorities.

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5eb9752086650c2799a57ac5/working-safely-during-covid-19-labs-research-facilities-240520.pdf>

BEIS Webinar - Working safely during Coronavirus:

Result of resources / guidance / slides from the webinar published here -

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/additional-government-resources-to-support-your-business-during-coronavirus-disruptions>

Specific to labs and research facilities - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/labs-and-research-facilities#labs-6-1>

Cleaning guidance - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>

Key Topics that were discussed in this session:

1. Prioritising individuals to return to work
2. Decontamination Principles
3. Are any organisations completing temperature checks
4. What are individuals doing in shared areas, is there a requirement to wear PPE outside the laboratories
5. What are the protocols if anyone is unwell whilst in work
6. If human tissue is stored and frozen, can the virus survive in these conditions?
7. What is the length of time that staff should be on site for?
8. Working where social distancing is not possible?
9. Using laboratory coats in confined areas
10. Running lab practicals before Christmas?

1) Prioritising individuals to return to work

Some research centres have been back to work on space rather than people. Limit the number of individuals per the space. Signs are placed on the entrances to rooms. Smaller rooms with microscopes would potentially only have 1 person on the door sign. Booking systems with more equipment should be utilised. The timing used in one research centre is to use 15 minute slots.

For laboratories, implementation of the number of individuals per bay should be looked into. Try to ensure people are back to back, or working in a zig-zag fashion, and not to be facing each other if the laboratory bay is less than 2m length.

1. Utilise shared calendars with line managers and departmental managers.
2. Extending the hours helps to keep work going. Using shifts to bring staff in.

Individuals working at senior management levels should have overall responsibility of determining when individuals should return to work safely. Making use of applications can be beneficial here and individuals can make the most of contacting these lead individuals to highlight their needs to returning to the laboratory and facilities.

Very much the understanding still that people should work from home where they can but if you need to use laboratories or resources, then you can come into the workplace as long as this is monitored.

Government Website link for working safely:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

2) Decontamination Principles

With people working in shifts on the same equipment, Bioguard and hand sanitisation stations should be used in as many places as possible. Give clear instructions on cleaning of equipment, particularly with keyboards.

Employing more cleaners to work in shifts across the day. Individuals working in their areas should take responsibility for their own working areas.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>

3) Are any organisations completing temperature checks

Temperature checks are not being done in places where there are diverse and vast sites across many organisations, so the use of temperature screens on people may miss people so this has not really been utilised in research centres.

John Innes Centre have a safe working requirements document which highlights when individuals should not come into work if they have any of the symptoms or are unwell.

Point of view from the website Healthline:

<https://www.healthline.com/health-news/temperature-checks-not-effective-preventive-measure-against-covid-19>

4) What are individuals doing in shared areas, is there a requirement to wear PPE outside the laboratories

Individuals are being advised that they should use PPE if they are working in areas with laminar flows.

If close contact is essential (such as taking blood) individuals should be wearing PPE where you cannot avoid close contact.

Corridors and narrow areas are being used as one way systems.

Canteens not to use metal cutlery, use as much disposal cutlery as possible.

One organisation are looking at sourcing obscuring coloured gloves to wear outside the laboratory so that they can distinguish between laboratory gloves.

University of York are using this simple handsfree product to open doors and turn off lights: https://www.instagram.com/biology_research_workshops/?hl=en

5) What are the protocols if anyone is unwell whilst in work

For a first aid response, some organisations have produced a first aider “grab bag” which includes gloves, face shield, aprons.

Welfare areas should be identified where people can isolate away from other individuals.

Make sure that individuals who are unwell and showing signs and symptoms of COVID-19, accident reporting should include the identification of people that the individual has come in contact with them.

6) If human tissue is stored and frozen, can the virus survive in these conditions?

This will depend on what the freezing media is and how protective this will be. Likely routes are respiratory based, and vast amounts of the virus would be needed to cause infection. It is good practice to treat these samples in the same way as HepB and HIV samples are kept and maintained.

7) What is the length of time that staff should be on site for?

Some places are encouraging fixed time hour shifts, but also allowing work before or after shifts if needed. Times can be determined on the basis of experiments, with the focus that people should work from home where they can and come in to work when they need to.

Some places are encouraging individuals to carry out the work for as long as individuals need to, as long as you are cleaning workplaces before and after use and alerting individuals responsible for being on site where you are.

Safezone application is being utilised in some organisations for normal working hours and out of hours, as well as for lone working.

<https://www.safezoneapp.com>

Below is information from the University of York on using Safezone:

<https://www.york.ac.uk/about/departments/support-and-admin/sas/slaw/security/safezone/>

Important issues to consider:

Are crossovers for shifts needed? Depending on the nature of the work, if experiments need to be continued and maintained across the course of the day. Generally people should work for the time period they feel is appropriate for their work.

Are all day shifts implemented alongside part-time shifts? Some places are ensuring technical managers are to be onsite at all times. Central services, such as stores, A&G, etc. will run during normal hours.

Plans to split technical teams to cover the proposed shifts? This would be ideal if possible to ensure that essential experiments that require work being carried out all day can be monitored over the morning by one part of the team and then monitored during the afternoon. Cleaning protocols should be in place here for all hard surfaces and PPE worn when appropriate.

8) Working where social distancing is not possible?

Human sampling and human measurement work involves being in close contact with each other. PPE should always be used when individuals need to come into close contact with people, you should consider whether this is necessary during the current situation.

The welfare of the individuals should be considered as to whether they are comfortable completing work like this. From a wellbeing point of view to get some people will only feel safe if PPE is available.

Some organisations are basing their decisions on PPE resources are quite low and in desperate need at some NHS trusts, therefore judgement needs to be made as to how important experiments and work is.

Social distancing, keeping businesses open and in-work activities during COVID-19: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/social-distancing-coronavirus.htm>

9) Using laboratory coats in confined areas

One organisation has mentioned that they are not sharing laboratory coats but are using drawstring bags to hold personalised laboratory coats alongside good hygiene and handwashing methods.

<https://www.wordans.co.uk/westford-mill-wm115-cotton-stuff-bag-9709/c195-natural/s56530-l>

10) Running laboratory practicals before Christmas?

Most organisations are not considering carrying out student practicals until next year and are making the most of virtual labs. This will need a lot of collaboration across universities and with students as to how this will affect learning outcomes.

Is it possible to bring in smaller groups before next year; coming in to look at vital skills only?

Proposing ideas to work with the students to come up with innovative ideas on how people can return safely to work. Working with relationship to allow students to be involved with the return to work.

Overseas students really appreciate face-to-face experiences, therefore there are decisions to be made as to the current situation on travel restrictions.

One organisation is extending their academic year and adding another semester into summer 2021 to carry out experiments and practical work.

Anything more to add or comment on? - Contact j.p.ashton@istonline.org.uk