THE Good Practice Sessions

Session 3: Wednesday 2nd June 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://istonline.org.uk/cms/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Principles-and-considerations-emerging-from-lockdown-June-2020.pdf

Key Topics that were discussed in this session:

1. **Laboratory Coats – They are there for our safety!**
2. **Tissue culture and Issues with Cross Contamination.**
3. **Technicians and Teams Going Back to Work.**
4. **Frequency of Fire Evacuation Drills.**
5. **Cleaning – Bio guard.**
6. **Essential Training and Practicals.**
7. **Animal Facilities.**
8. **Teaching Laboratories.**

1) Laboratory Coats – They are there for our safety!

Laboratory coats should always be worn whilst undertaking experiments and whilst working in the laboratories. Health and Safety standards should be adhered to when working with hazardous solutions and media as this is essential for normal working practice. Potentially, it is worth noting that the same principles should apply now as when working with genetically modified organisms and toxic substances.

Individuals should focus more on ensuring they was their hands regularly, if they sneeze, they should blow their noses in tissues and throw straight into bins and to have good overall personal hygiene in general. Avoid putting hands into pockets. Wash laboratory coats more often and to wash on site rather than going externally, unless the external companies have clear policies and SOPs to avoid risk of COVID transfer.

2) Tissue culture and Issues with Cross Contamination.

The same approach to testing of mycoplasma can be applied to COVID-19 and in general, good laboratory practice is advised, use the correct procedures and processes, store all media and consumables properly and carry out regular PCRs.

Information on Cell Culture Protocol from the Sigma webpages - Testing Cells for Mycoplasma Contamination by Culture Isolation:
https://www.sigmaaldrich.com/technical-documents/protocols/biology/testing-for-mycoplasma.html

3) Technicians and Teams Going Back to Work.

Technical staff will be one of the first groups of individuals to go back into the workplace to undertake maintenance tests, legionella flushing and preparation of equipment.

It is important to look at where your equipment is, move to different places where you possibly can and if not fixed move, so people can observe social distancing.

Look at the configuration of the laboratories and working spaces and carry out an assessment to work out the maximum capacity that can work in one room. Put signs on the doors to indicate that capacity. Utilise web based booking systems, including google calendar to indicate where individuals are.

Researchers and within research groups, workplans should be drawn up, so everyone can see if there are any conflicts with working in similar areas and on the same equipment.

Teams that are working together should have specific areas where they can remain in bubbled areas. The idea of working in bubble research laboratories or working surfaces is, that a team working together who work with each other all the time, maintain working in a separate area to other groups, therefore if one individual is tested positive in that bubble, then that bubble will be able to isolate. It is good practice to define by marking exactly where individuals can go on the lab benches and in areas.

4) Frequency of Fire Evacuation Drills.

As people and teams not been in the buildings, it is essential to ensure that fire evacuations and fire tests are carried out for safety. Individual organisations should determine the frequency of fire evacuation testing. Health and Safety required organisations to carry out evacuations so as to ensure individuals working are familiar with where to go in case of a fire, and that they can clear the building quickly.

Government guidelines highlight that COVID procedures should be secondary to fire evacuation protocols. In order for you and your teams to be safe, advise that if there is a test or indeed a real fire, to leave non-essential items behind and exit in an ordinary fashion, taking good care with not touching surfaces and to move straight to the assembly point and keep distanced when in an area of safety.

5) Cleaning – Bio guard.

Research Centres are using Bio Guard solutions to clean surfaces and find that these are preferable over 70% Industrial Methylated Spirits.
https://www.bioguardhygiene.co.uk/products/disinfectant-cleaning-solution/

Deeper cleans are advised and cleaning more regular.
It is good practice to ensure that when you go back into work, that laboratories should be cleaned, remove anything you don't need and prepare workstations. Cleaning should be carried out at the start of practicals/experiments and at the end of practicals/experiments.

6) Essential Training and Practicals.

Carry out virtual training as much as possible (using a mixture of virtual and physical practicals). Make use of demonstrators to carry out virtual teaching with virtual labs. Students could then write up the practicals afterwards. Use polls and interact with those that you are facilitating the training with.

If new equipment is being set up by external contractors, ask if instructors can record the training and send on video.

When you need to carry out on site training, keep distanced as much as possible, wear masks and appropriate PPE, observe good hygiene and hand washing protocols. If your practical is essential for going near individuals (taking blood), ensure that, gloves, aprons, and masks are worn as well as visas – doubling up where you can.

7) Animal Facilities.

Animal facilities can be quite contained and closed environments so it would be difficult to social distance. Tape markings on the floor are advised here to ensure that individuals are maintaining distances.

Training in animal research facilities in general, should be upto institutions to ensure trainers are happy and safe. Risk assessments should be put in place to identify what relevant steps are needed to mitigate the risk of transfer.

Any questions that can't be answered at the institutions should be referred to the secretary of state at the home office. Heads of services and animal facilities should be in regular contact with the home office secretary of state.

Risk assessments must reflect and assess whether animals may present with the virus, unless you can test them all but a test is only viable for that period of time.

It is essential and good practice to make sure YOU are carrying out the risk assessments for work that you are doing. This ensures that you will be safe as you will be following the guides and risk mitigation that you have put in place. Review as a technical team and sign off as a group to ensure everyone in the team is happy.

8) Teaching Laboratories.

Larger spaces but with the reduced number capacities may mean having to run practical classes multiple times. Sometimes due to the size of student classes this is not possible.

An idea suggested could be to carry out group work, where half of the group are remote and half are on site, socially distancing. Then they would swap on another day or another week. Hands on learning is really important. Just like driving a car, you need to be able to drive the car physically to drive it. Students typically would prefer to be more hands on. Therefore, institutions should push back practicals as far as possible. Potentially maximise the practicals to carry out more intense experiments covering the basic skills that you can concentrate on over shorter periods of times.

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