
Updates about spring lab/studio safety protocs and new Playbook

1 message

Robert Bernhard <Robert.J.Bernhard.9@nd.edu>

Mon, Feb 1, 2021 at 1:44 PM

To: Robert Bernhard <rbernhar@nd.edu>

Bcc: vpr-updates-list@nd.edu

Dear Colleagues,

I hope you had a good and productive winter break. As our undergraduate student population returns to campus, we anticipate a significant change in activity compared to the winter break. In anticipation, the Research and Graduate Studies Task Force developed an update on policy and guidelines that are applicable to research within the labs and studios for the spring semester.

Lessons Learned

The Task Force used the winter break to audit both the incidence of infections among laboratory active students and staff and our Lab/Studio Playbook.

For the audit of infections, we asked the contract tracing office to find and investigate incidents of infections happening in a single lab within a period of time where the possible transmission could occur. Of the 33 infections that occurred among our lab/studio population last fall, there were no cases where lab based interactions were identified as the definitive cause of transmission. There were 2 cases where the source of transmission is undetermined and lab transmission could not be ruled out. But even in these two cases the individuals involved thought lab based transmission was unlikely. We believe that the protocols that were in place in the fall were sufficient to prevent transmission in labs and associated offices and we plan to continue to follow the same principles this spring.

For the audit of the Playbook, we asked the Research Offices at four peer universities to review our Playbook and provide feedback. We received excellent feedback about how to streamline the Playbook to make it more effective, but very little advice on changing policies.

As you can imagine, when we reviewed the Playbook we found many places where we could make updates based on an improved understanding of the coronavirus compared to when the original Playbook was written last May. We have incorporated changes to ease restrictions where possible while maintaining a margin for safety and health to ensure we get through what we hope will be a final period of risk before vaccinations and herd immunity give us an opportunity to return to normal.

University Policies

You have probably seen the updated policies that the University has published for the spring semester. Relevant policies include:

- The [Campus Compact](#) spells out expectations for undergraduate and professional students. Behavioral expectations for faculty, staff, and grad students continue from the fall in terms of adherence to the covid safety protocols -- see also the Jan 21st [letter](#) from Provost Miranda and Executive Vice President Cullinan to these groups. For the graduate students in labs and studios,

these expectations, as well as disciplinary approaches, are documented in the [Lab/Studio Playbook](#).

- The [Visitors to Campus](#) Policy for spring will revert to a policy similar to that used in the fall semester where we will try to isolate the campus as much as possible.
- The [Travel Policy](#) for spring is also reverting to a policy very similar to the fall policy.
- The [Gatherings Policy](#) applies to large meetings, such as workshops, and should be considered when planning events that are larger than lab group meetings.

Testing

As you are aware, undergraduate and professional students must complete a pre-matriculation test when they return to campus at the University Testing Center. The doctoral and graduate students are not required to participate in pre-matriculation testing, but saliva lab testing is available and encouraged. **For graduate students, faculty, and staff who are on campus in labs and studios, it is an expectation that you will complete saliva based surveillance once every two weeks.** You are able to schedule this testing to fit your schedule but you will not be able to walk in to the testing center without an appointment like you did during winter break. You may also be called by the testing center to do what is referred to as “adaptive testing,” which will be designed to check hot spots and do random surveillance. If you are called, you are expected to participate and compliance will be monitored.

Lab/Studio Guidance and Revised Playbook

As a result of lessons learned, University policy, and the existing conditions locally and nationally, the Task Force reconsidered guidance for labs and studios for the spring semester. Given the high level of continuing risk due to the return of undergraduate students and the potential risks of new virus variants, and based on consultation with others, we have decided to maintain the Lab/Studios at [Phase 3](#) conditions. We believe that significant protections and care are still warranted. If the environment changes over the course of the semester, the Task Force will adapt and issue updated guidance. The Task Force is also willing to consider exceptions for compelling cases where the proposed operational plan comprehends what we now understand as the mechanisms of transmission. The Associate Deans are your first point of contact to explore opportunities for exceptions.

The updated Playbook is posted at research.nd.edu/continuity. To shortcut your review, the most significant changes are:

- **Log sheets:** log sheets are no longer required for labs and studios due to changes in contact tracing and surveillance testing policies.
- **Disinfecting surfaces:** guidance has changed from being frequently required to focusing on ensuring shared equipment and furnishings are disinfected before and after use.
- **Occupancy:** guidance about occupancy limits has been updated and now suggests 200 feet² per person and six feet spacing in the laboratories, studios, or core facilities.

We hope you have a great semester and are able to move your research forward effectively and successfully.

Sincerely,

Bob Bernhard

Robert J. Bernhard
Vice President for Research
University of Notre Dame

Notre Dame, Indiana 46556

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Status Update about Lab/Studio Protocols

1 message

Robert Bernhard <Robert.J.Bernhard.9@nd.edu>
To: Research Space Reopening <vpr-updates-list@nd.edu>

Mon, Apr 12, 2021 at 12:22 PM

Dear Colleagues,

With the recently announced availability of vaccinations for the entire Notre Dame community, we expect that we will be able to relax some health protocols for research labs and studios provided that vaccination rates are high. We have checked with the University policymakers and have been told that University policy for gatherings (as in labs and studios), travel, and visitors are in development and will generally follow CDC guidance. Provided that we have no surprises related to the effectiveness of the vaccines, we believe that will mean that we will be able to return the labs and studios to near-normal operations sometime after a high percentage of those regularly in the labs and studios are deemed fully vaccinated.. However we are mindful that special considerations might be required when certain individuals in a lab group have not been vaccinated or there are other special circumstances. We hope to have this guidance compiled and available soon.

If you know of any special circumstances that we should consider as we finalize guidance, or you have suggestions, please pass them along to me, Melanie DeFord, or the Associate Deans.

Sincerely,

Bob Bernhard

Robert J. Bernhard
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Labs/Studios/Cores Pilot Study Starts May 24

Robert Bernhard <Robert.J.Bernhard.9@nd.edu>

Mon, May 10, 2021 at 1:18 PM

To: Research Space Reopening <vpr-updates-list@nd.edu>

Dear Colleagues,

Research labs/studios and core facilities will be offered an opportunity to participate in a pilot study this summer that will inform campus policy for the fall semester. In Step 1, densities will return to normal. We hope that in subsequent steps, participating labs will have the opportunity to pilot the removal of masks indoors. Such additional steps will depend upon factors such as the virulence of variants; the effectiveness of the vaccines; vaccination rates for personnel within labs; CDC guidance and positivity rates in the county. We anticipate each step to last approximately 4 weeks, the duration to be determined by a power analysis associated with weekly surveillance testing of this population. More information and details about each subsequent step will be forthcoming as we get closer to the next step. We hope that the majority of labs will participate. The information collected is expected to be very valuable for managing health and safety on campus this fall.

The personnel in pilot labs/studios/core facilities will be required to participate in weekly mandatory surveillance testing. High levels of compliance are expected for a lab/studio/core facility to participate in the pilot. We will not ask about vaccination status but encourage all lab/studio/core facility faculty, staff, postdocs, and students to be vaccinated and to upload documentation of their vaccination. The rate of vaccination may become an important factor for moving to future steps. Feedback regarding the incidence of positive cases in the labs/studios/core facilities will follow the same contact tracing and quarantine protocols that have been employed to date.

Details about Step 1 for labs/studios/core facilities participating in the pilot study:

- Phase 3.1 will start approximately May 24, 2021
- Participating labs/studios/core facilities may return to full density. In some cases, a student, staff member or faculty member may be granted an accommodation for health reasons. Lab directors must establish protocols to realize these accommodations.
- Masks are required indoors.
- Physical distancing should be utilized when possible, but can be reduced to 3 ft as necessary.
- Cleaning protocols of hard surfaces may be relaxed.
- Weekly surveillance testing is required. Scheduling of surveillance testing will be flexible and convenient. Details will follow prior to May 24.
- Outdoor breaks are encouraged as masks are no longer required outdoors when physical distancing is maintained or in groups of vaccinated individuals.
- For large shared labs (e.g., McCourtney Hall) all groups sharing the same lab/studio space must agree to participate in the pilot study.
- Current eating protocols remain in place for Phase 3.1.
- Existing office occupancy protocols remain in place for Phase 3.1.
- Faculty, staff, and postdocs are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated or upload the documentation if already vaccinated. Graduate, professional and undergraduate students who will be on campus for 7 or more consecutive days or regularly working in a lab/studio/core facility during the summer are

required to be vaccinated. This requirement applies to most active student lab/studio personnel. All students will be required to be vaccinated in order to enroll in the fall semester.

- Reports on weekly compliance for surveillance testing will be sent to the VP for Research and to the Deans; high compliance is expected for the pilot to continue.

Labs/studios/core facilities that want to participate in the pilot (and we hope participation is nearly universal) will be asked to furnish a list of all summer lab/studio/core facility personnel with NDID numbers (900 numbers) via a form that will shortly be circulated to lab directors. These lists will be used to set up the weekly surveillance testing and identify pilot study participants. Participants will receive a testing pass color-coded based on compliance -- green if they completed testing that week or red if not. Lab/studios/core facilities will receive notification of approval to move to Phase 3.1 from the Associate Deans for Research, or Melanie DeFord, as appropriate.

We hope all of the lab/studios/core facilities will join the pilot study. The information will be very useful and may give us an opportunity to loosen restrictions on the labs/studios/core facilities through late summer and the fall semester.

Sincerely,

Bob Bernhard

Robert J. Bernhard
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Moving to Lab/Studio/Core Phase 3.1

Robert Bernhard <Robert.J.Bernhard.9@nd.edu>

Tue, May 18, 2021 at 3:41 PM

To: Robert Bernhard <rbernhar@nd.edu>

Bcc: vpr-updates-list@nd.edu

Dear Colleagues,

We continue on track to move to Phase 3.1 next Monday for those labs/studios/cores that have chosen to participate in the pilot project. Lab directors should have received an email last Friday to opt-in and supply a lab roster. If you did not receive that email, please contact the Associate Deans or Melanie DeFord. Participation in this pilot project is very much appreciated.

With the recent announcement of new recommendations for vaccinated individuals from the CDC, additional steps may be possible soon. An important factor in moving to that next step will be the overall vaccination rate of the lab/studio/core population. It is our understanding that within the entire University community, more than 90% of the student body, 70% of faculty and 55% of staff have verified that they are vaccinated. We hope to use the lab rosters that are being provided by the lab directors to determine the verified vaccination rate for the lab population. If the rate meets a reasonable threshold, we hope to make the case that masks can be removed in the labs and in the office spaces populated by a highly vaccinated lab/studio/core population. If you have not uploaded your vaccination to the site, please do so [here](#). Note that we do not expect to use the vaccination data for individual labs - only for the entire lab/studio/core population.

Personnel from the labs/studios/cores that have chosen to participate in the pilot project will receive instructions on how to schedule testing by separate email. In general, testing will be more flexible than it was for the spring semester. You will be able to sign up for a day and to visit the test site anytime that day.

- The scheduling system will be available to testers to begin scheduling on Saturday, May 22. We will send out an email with the link closer to that date.
- Testing will be open Monday - Thursday, 9am - 1pm from May 24 - Aug 12.
- The system will exempt people from testing who are in Q/I or have been positive in the past 90 days.
- Testers will be able to indicate an "out of office" exemption on their test page with days for vacation or travel over the summer and they will not appear as non-compliant.

Lab directors will be able to update rosters throughout the summer at the link <https://forms.gle/aoZddMurV9Q1uXtV6>. Also, the details of this letter and other aspects of Phase 3.1 and subsequent steps will continue to be posted on the [research continuity website](#) for your reference.

Sincerely,

Bob Bernhard

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Labs/Studios/Cores Pilot Study Starts May 24

Robert Bernhard <Robert.J.Bernhard.9@nd.edu>

Fri, May 28, 2021 at 12:33 PM

To: Robert Bernhard <rbernhar@nd.edu>

Cc: Melanie DeFord <mdeford@nd.edu>, James Brockmole <jbrockm1@nd.edu>, Steven Corcelli <scorcell@nd.edu>, "Mark J. McCready" <mjm@nd.edu>

Bcc: vpr-updates-list@nd.edu

Dear Colleagues,

My apologies for sending a second email note about Phase 3.1. Due to fast changing policy we have had to adjust [Phase 3.1 protocols](#) a couple of times. I'm hopeful we can settle into a routine --- until we move to Phase 3.2 :-).

To date, lab directors have enrolled approximately 1000 lab participants in the Phase 3.1 pilot project. This is a great number for the pilot project. Those who were enrolled by the lab directors received an email invitation last Saturday to schedule their surveillance testing. To date, only about 60% of the enrolled participants have scheduled their testing day. If you have not scheduled your testing day, please do so [at the scheduling link](#). Weekly testing is part of the pilot even if you are vaccinated. We very much appreciate your participation and expect that weekly testing will provide significant helpful information as we consider our ability to move to future phases.

We need to make one change in the guidance we passed along with my note on May 10 (see below). With its recent policy, the University requires masks indoors but no social distancing or density limits. We also understand that the signs designating occupancy limits will be removed next week so there will not be a visible reference for occupancy expectations in campus spaces. In our original guidance for the pilot project we had stated that

- Existing office occupancy protocols remain in place for Phase 3.1.

As a result of the new University policy, we **are rescinding** this requirement for offices, conference rooms and gathering spaces. There will be no specified occupancy protocols of office-like spaces in Phase 3.1. Lab directors or local space managers may choose to impose stricter protocols in consultation with members of the group. We support their judgment to maintain a safe environment in what will be a mixed population of vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals for some time. Please note that **masks must be worn at all times inside buildings** unless in a private office. Also, we have not changed the protocols from the spring semester about eating meals indoors.

We know that many of you are looking forward to the possibility of removing masks in the labs and a relaxation of the eating protocols. We've heard your requests and the associated reasoning. We are preparing to make the case for a Phase 3.2 where masks may be removed in certain circumstances and eating protocols are relaxed. Our case is stronger if the lab occupants are vaccinated. At this time, approximately 83% of the 1000 participants enrolled in the pilot project have been verified to be vaccinated. The higher we can raise the vaccination rate in conjunction with regular surveillance testing, the better chance we have to make a case for Phase 3.2. I encourage all of you who have not yet been vaccinated to make an appointment for your shot at your relevant vaccination websites (see here for [Indiana](#) and [Michigan](#)).

With all of these rapid changes, we understand that there will be questions and concerns. Our [link to report concerns](#) is still active. In addition, the Associate Deans for Research, Melanie DeFord and I are available to talk to you about any issues associated with lab/studio/core reopening.

Thank you for your support of and participation in Phase 3.1. I hope you have a very productive summer of research.

Sincerely,

Bob Bernhard

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Updated Mask Guidance for Research Labs/Studios/Cores

1 message

Robert Bernhard <Robert.J.Bernhard.9@nd.edu>

Thu, Jun 3, 2021 at 9:23 PM

To: Robert Bernhard <rbernhar@nd.edu>

Bcc: vpr-updates-list@nd.edu

Dear Colleagues,

This note is a follow up to the note you received earlier today from the University's Executive Officers and/or from Student Affairs/Graduate School leadership. Based on the new University policy that those who are fully vaccinated by one of the three vaccines approved in the United States (Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech, Johnson & Johnson) do not need to wear their masks indoors, we are writing to confirm that masks are no longer required in labs/studios/cores for vaccinated individuals or in offices or conference rooms associated with the labs/studios/cores. I know this is a welcome change for many of you.

For those who may be uncomfortable with this situation, we encourage you to consult with your lab director, the Graduate School or the [reopening hotline](#). Note that those who are vaccinated may choose to wear masks as a matter of personal safety.

For those who are not vaccinated, to support the health of our community, the new policy expects that you will continue to wear a mask indoors. We also encourage those who are not vaccinated to sign up for surveillance testing if you are regularly coming to campus. We encourage those who have not yet been vaccinated to make an appointment for your shot at your relevant vaccination websites (see here for [Indiana](#) and [Michigan](#))

Notre Dame faculty, staff and students working in the IU School of Medicine buildings south of campus, Harper Hall and Raclin Carmichael Hall, will need to follow IU policy in the hallways and common spaces. Currently, that means masks are required in these common spaces. However, vaccinated lab participants may remove masks in Notre Dame operated labs/cores.

The University would still very much appreciate the continuation of our effort to have a robust pilot program for the summer to monitor COVID cases, virus variants, and the limits of immunity. We hope those of you who are enrolled in the pilot program will be willing to continue to participate in surveillance testing for the summer. The Research and Graduate Studies Task Force has been authorized to offer incentives to lab groups that continue in the pilot program. The Task Force has not yet finalized those incentives. We will be back in touch with details soon. We welcome your ideas about rewards that your lab/studio/core might find worthwhile for finishing the pilot program.

Sincerely,

Bob Bernhard

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Research Labs/Studios/Cores at Phase 4.0 and update on summer pilot program testing

1 message

Robert Bernhard <Robert.J.Bernhard.9@nd.edu>

Wed, Jun 16, 2021 at 9:58 AM

To: Robert Bernhard <rbernhar@nd.edu>

Bcc: vpr-updates-list@nd.edu

Dear Colleagues,

Now that we have been able to relax density and masking requirements, the research labs/studios/cores have moved to Phase 4.0. Phase 4.0 is described in the [lab reopening playbook](#) as

Return to full research operations with few to no limitations. In some cases, protocols for phases beyond Phase 3 may be locally defined under the guidance of Deans and Department Chairs in consultation with the VPR.

Note that Lab Reopening Phase 4.0 does allow lab directors, departments or colleges to impose more restrictive local protocols as they deem appropriate.

In Phase 3.1 we announced a pilot program that included surveillance testing for the summer. Part of the motivation of the testing program was to monitor the presence of the virus on campus and learn lessons of how we might manage campus this fall when the population is larger and there are new possible challenges such as new variants and possible limitations of immunity. We plan to continue the surveillance program this summer despite moving to Lab Reopening Phase 4.0. To express our appreciation for those who test at least seven weeks this summer (ending August 12, 2021), we will offer \$25 Domer Dollars to your account. All who complete the seven weeks of testing will also be given a chance to win a pair of tickets to an ND football game; a drawing will be held for each of this year's seven games, with each game's winner selected from the eligible participants. If you are enrolled in the Pilot Program, you will be receiving an email from Liz Rulli, Associate Vice President for Research, with details about summer testing. If you have not been enrolled, you can sign up [here](#).

Sincerely,

Bob Bernhard

Robert J. Bernhard
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Summer Surveillance Testing - Thank You

1 message

Robert Bernhard <Robert.J.Bernhard.9@nd.edu>

Mon, Aug 30, 2021 at 9:14 AM

To: Robert Bernhard <rbernar@nd.edu>

Cc: "Elizabeth S. Rulli" <lrulli@nd.edu>, Susan Tuskan <stuskan@nd.edu>

Bcc: vpr-updates-list@nd.edu

Dear Colleagues,

This note is intended for those that participated in the summer surveillance program. Some of you persisted in weekly testing despite the fact that safety protocols were relaxed early in the summer. We are very grateful to those who did. Your participation gave us insights on what was happening on campus this summer. Fortunately, there were very few infections, and we are confident of that information because of the asymptomatic testing we were able to do with our volunteers.

We did over 8,000 tests this summer. The 664 individuals that tested 7 or more times during the summer should have received their \$25 Domer Dollar Incentive several weeks ago. As promised, we will hold the drawing for the ND football home game tickets this week. The winners will be notified.

As we begin the fall semester, our surveillance testing focus is on testing the unvaccinated faculty, staff and students. We hope to be able to offer the opportunity for additional voluntary testing for vaccinated individuals as well depending on how things go with the mandatory surveillance testing.

Sincerely,

Bob Bernhard

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Lab/Studio/Core Update

Robert Bernhard <Robert.J.Bernhard.9@nd.edu>

Tue, Aug 31, 2021 at 9:55 AM

To: Robert Bernhard <rbernhar@nd.edu>

Bcc: ndr-all-list@nd.edu

Dear Colleagues,

I'm writing a brief note at the beginning of the fall 2021 semester to offer a summary of relevant information about policy and protocols for the labs, studios and core facilities. I'm copying the NDR faculty and staff for their information.

At this time, there are no density or [masking](#) requirements in place for vaccinated employees in labs, studios or cores. That said, lab and core directors may impose such requirements if they feel uncomfortable given the current state of infection in the region or if there are members of their group who are vulnerable or uncomfortable. Please respect such protocols if issued by lab directors or core facility management.

One potential area of concern are small and poorly ventilated shared offices that are occupied for a significant amount of time. In such rooms, masking on its own may not maintain the type of protection that some desire. For such cases, we recommend that occupants work with their supervisors to develop a plan to either work remotely or vary their schedules in order to minimize exposure to aerosol transmission of possible coronaviruses.

There is a requirement for all students, staff and faculty to be [vaccinated](#). There is an exception process for those who cannot be vaccinated or have strong objections. Those with exceptions must complete surveillance testing every week and wear a mask whenever they are with others. I understand that compliance with these requirements is approximately 97% on campus. Those not in compliance with one of these two options are being identified to supervisors who have been asked to address these issues.

Currently, surveillance [testing](#) using the saliva lab is only available to non-symptomatic individuals who are required to test as a condition of an exception to the vaccination mandate. All symptomatic individuals should test at the appropriate station at the JACC or at an external test provider. As the semester unfolds, we hope to be able to offer voluntary surveillance testing.

Domestic travel, including for research purposes, is permitted with no current restrictions. International travel is allowed with permission of a Dean or Vice President and must be registered with NDI. More details of the travel policy are available [here](#).

Research related visits and gatherings are possible this fall. This can include individual visitors, such as faculty and students from another university or service personnel or visitors who come to Notre Dame for an event, such as a seminar or workshop. The Visitor's Policy states "Visitors to campus, regardless of vaccination status, are expected to wear masks inside campus buildings (except when eating and drinking), again in an effort to help us protect our community. Minors can participate in campus-based activities with a mask on. Masks are not required outdoors on campus." If you are planning an event, the [Gatherings Policy](#) or the [Community Engagement Policy](#) may be relevant.

Please note that our [lab reopening hotline](#) to report problems or concerns remains active and is continuously monitored.

If you would like to opt-out of this listserv, please email vpr-updates-list+unsubscribe@nd.edu. If you know anyone that should be added, such as new graduate students, please email Michael Hughes (mhughe24@nd.edu), Notre Dame Research Communications Specialist, who will add them.

Sincerely,

Bob Bernhard

Robert J. Bernhard
Vice President for Research
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