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**Subject:** Scaling Back On-campus Research  
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**To:** deptgroup@mit.edu



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## Massachusetts Institute of Technology

*Apologies in advance if you already received this. We wanted to make sure all key stakeholders were included.*

Dear Colleagues,

We appreciate very much the thoughtful and constructive advice we have received in response to our communications yesterday. In this note, we want to provide more guidance regarding managing our research activities going forward.

### **Why are we doing this?**

It is important to stress two things. First, our goal through this exercise is to minimize person-to-person interactions for all members of our community in order to limit the spread of the virus. This includes not only our researchers, but the people who support our research, our research facilities and the Institute, and the general public with whom we interact in the course of getting to and being present at work. Second, this is not a shutdown of research at MIT. We hope and expect that much of the research we will do in this period of time will be conducted remotely and that researchers will shift as much of their work as possible to this format. However, some research is necessarily conducted in our on-campus facilities. For this research, our goal is to reduce the number of people engaged in this work and to do this by prioritizing the most critical activities in light of the current world situation.

### **Addressing the decentralized and heterogeneous nature of our research work**

Research at MIT is managed in a highly decentralized way, and the means of conducting research varies widely across campus. For this reason, there is a limit to what we can do centrally to address this crisis. Consequently, we aim to leverage the distributed leadership of lab directors and department heads and we will put in place a structure that allows for sharing of best practices and detailed guidance. We have encouraged the Deans to convene the leaders in their organizations on a regular basis, and we will in kind convene the Deans, VPR and Provost. In this document we provide some broad guidance based upon feedback we have received to this point.

### **How long will this last?**

The simple answer is that it is hard to predict. Some have suggested a few weeks, others feel this could go on for several months. Our decision on the timeline will be guided by advice from medical and public health professionals regarding when we feel the risk of

advice from medical and public health professionals regarding when we feel the risk of exposure is acceptably reduced. For now, the best we can offer is that organizations should plan for a protracted period of disruption, and we will be sure to maintain regular communication.

## Guiding Principles

Our goal is to reduce the density of people on campus and in research laboratories. While a specific quantitative goal is hard to define because of the nature of our physical spaces, we believe reducing to 10-20% of our normal density makes sense and is consistent with the guidance others are providing. Ideally we should not only reduce physical presence in the labs, but where possible we should seek to reduce to zero the occupancy of some spaces by managing access. This will create the opportunity to reduce the concurrent support staff work that researchers expect to find or that MIT is obligated to provide in buildings.

We should define what is critical activity based upon local criteria, but some suggestions include:

- Lab work where discontinuation would generate significant data and sample loss
- Work to maintain critical equipment and safe standby mode in laboratories
- Work to maintain critical samples and animal populations
- Work that directly relates to COVID-19 that has a timeline for deployment that could address the current crisis

In addition, we wish to emphasize that we are cognizant of the concerns of our graduate students, post-docs and junior faculty whose early career development and promotions depend on output of their labs, and we are considering options for mitigation.

We strongly encourage that any team that is critical to maintaining operations be divided so as to ensure continuity of critical functions in the event of a single team member being diagnosed with COVID-19. In the same vein, if critical operations are reliant on a single individual, we should develop contingencies should that individual become infected.

Labs will be encouraged to consider their supply chain and particularly where critical supplies are either sole-sourced or sourced from regions that are highly disrupted by COVID-19. **Labs can reach out to VPF's Strategic Sourcing Unit ([strategic-sourcing@mit.edu](mailto:strategic-sourcing@mit.edu)) for assistance in evaluating and addressing supply chain vulnerabilities.**

## Additional guidance

Even with reduced density of 10-20% operations, all labs must implement [social distancing and other best practices](#) and develop individualized work plans that minimize [close contact](#).

Human subject research which requires in-person contact needs to be suspended. This applies not only to campus, but also in field work. Virtual interaction is permitted.

Interdepartmental Lab leaders should make sure they are coordinating action with the Department Heads and Deans that are relevant to their unit.

The Institute is working very hard to ensure that core services (power, etc.) will be maintained.

We need to recognize that some researchers may feel pressured to work in laboratories when they don't feel it is appropriate. We need to remind community members that concerns like this should be addressed using established channels including the confidential [hotline](#).

[Research Administration Services](#) (RAS) and the [Office of Strategic Alliances and Technology Transfer](#) (OSATT), working with the Office of the General Counsel (OGC), have begun to engage our research sponsors (federal and non-federal) regarding the contractual implications of scaled-back on-campus research. Further guidance on this will be provided on an ongoing basis, including guidance regarding financial implications of the scale back.

One consequence of the scaled back research and remote work is that the campus will have far fewer people and we will need to make sure that spaces and valuables are secured. MIT Campus Security is mindful of this concern and will be taking appropriate measures.

We are continuing to ask that PIs work with their respective Department Heads and Lab Directors to develop a scale-back plan by end of day tomorrow (Monday March 16), with anticipated implementation no later than Friday March 20. We are not at this point offering specific recommendations for what the scale back plans each PI develops should look like, as many Lab Directors and Department Heads have already begun soliciting these plans. All plans should be consistent with MIT EHS policies. As these plans emerge, we will look for opportunities to create more common formats and sharing best practice. It seems likely that we will need to think of these plans as living documents.

Finally, we need to develop methods to stay engaged and supportive of our remote workforce. We will work to provide some guidance and ideas in this regard, but we encourage you to think creatively about how you might do this.

Sincerely,

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Provost

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Vice President for Research

Anthony P. Sharon  
Acting Deputy Executive Vice President

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