



May 16, 2020

*This message is being sent to the U-M research community (faculty and research staff with active sponsored research). Please share this information with your colleagues.*

Dear faculty and research staff,

I am pleased to announce that [Gov. Gretchen Whitmer yesterday authorized](#) the limited reopening of laboratory research. Research leadership from across the University of Michigan campuses are solidifying dates for when we can safely re-engage research activity through carefully managed waves, in accordance with the governor's authorization. We anticipate the first wave of lab buildings—a pilot wave—to begin toward the end of this coming week. Your research leadership will provide further details regarding dates for re-engagement.

The university prepared for this directive, and we have developed guidelines for how to safely re-engage limited research activity that is compliant with state regulations and other public health guidance. These planning efforts will play a critical role as we navigate research and scholarship amid the rapidly changing COVID-19 situation.

It is important for us to first acknowledge that not everyone can safely resume his or her research and scholarship on the same date, and laboratories that are allowed to reopen will do so at a limited capacity in conformity with state regulations. We will have to operate much differently in the months ahead to protect health and safety.

We recognize that entry and work within labs could *individually* be accomplished with minimal risk of transmission, but we must *collectively* keep the total number of people in lab buildings at low density. For us to do this properly and eventually resume all in-person research, we need everyone to cooperate. We plan to ramp up research and scholarship in a series of waves according to state and other public health guidance to pilot our new procedures, while protecting our employees, students and the communities we live in.

The governor's recent announcement applies only to research activities in a laboratory setting. The university will maintain its current restrictions on in-person human subjects research.

Studies with investigational treatments, such as drugs and devices or stabilization of high-risk psychological conditions, that provide the potential for direct therapeutic benefit that were previously approved should continue.

*All lab work that can occur remotely will continue to be done in that manner, including office research and dry lab work.* Faculty, staff and student office space outside of our experimental laboratories in these buildings should remain closed until such time they can safely reopen.

### **A gradual reopening**

We anticipate at least four waves of building reopenings over May and June. This will help us transition from our current state of critical and essential research only, to operating more than 5,000 lab spaces at the socially distancing capacity allowable under state guidelines.

The first wave will be a ***pilot wave*** in which we will collectively identify the issues and challenges of implementing these guidelines at scale, which we can course-correct. Six schools, colleges and units on the Ann Arbor campus will have laboratories or research studios in 1-2 buildings each participating in this pilot wave.

These buildings were selected based on a principled approach that will maximize information and learning in the pilot wave to aid with success in subsequent waves. Research leadership, in coordination with the U-M Research Ramp-Up Committee, accounted for a number of staging variables, including the need to have cores and vivaria functional now for later waves to proceed:

- College of Engineering; College of Literature, Science, and the Arts; College of Pharmacy; Life Sciences Institute; Medical School; and Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning.
- Buildings that will reopen during the pilot wave include:
  - Art and Architecture Building
  - Biomedical Science Research Building
  - Chemistry Building
  - Electrical Engineering and Computer Science Building
  - G.G. Brown Building
  - Life Sciences Institute Building
  - North University Building
  - Pharmacy Building
- During the pilot wave, we will limit the total number of researchers returning to work, and we will limit to one shift to minimize complexity.

### **Building access**

Buildings that are not open for laboratory/studio-based research remain restricted to critical approved personnel only. Buildings that will open for laboratory/studio-based research will not yet be open to other activities beyond the approved research or approved critical activities.

Schools, colleges and units have developed specific research re-engagement plans that outline the schedule for building reopenings in the planned waves, and the manner in which they will approve individual lab safety plans. I encourage you to work with your research leadership to obtain lab approvals and complete the necessary training requirements before returning to in-person work.

University-wide guidelines and plans for how to safely re-engage research amid COVID-19 also are provided on our [Research Re-engagement webpage](#), which covers important details such as entry into buildings and how many individuals can safely occupy research spaces. I also encourage you to visit our [COVID-19 Research Operations webpage](#) for FAQs as it relates to research re-engagement planning.

It is important to remember that decisions regarding graduate students and postdoctoral researchers returning to work is a shared decision. Please communicate with your graduate students and postdocs about the status of your research lab.

Graduate students and postdocs should work with their faculty mentors to develop a mutually agreeable plan that allows them to return to on-campus research. Graduate programs or departments can help by providing specific guidance for the development of work plans describing the ramp up, and also ensure the ramp up in activity is accomplished in a safe and equitable manner.

We will continue to assess this situation to ensure faculty and staff can safely manage their research and scholarship amid COVID-19. With guidance from public health experts, we will reevaluate the pilot wave of buildings' performance metrics for safety, health and compliance within state guidelines. We then would ideally launch a more expansive second wave of laboratory reopenings across schools, colleges and units about two weeks after this initial wave begins.

These are not easy decisions, and as a fellow researcher, I understand the challenges of pausing your research and scholarship endeavors, and also that the pace of this process is frustratingly slow. But we have to get this right in order to protect the health and safety of our employees, local communities and region, and to ensure the university can proceed with a public health-informed fall academic semester.

Transparency remains critical throughout this pandemic, and so our plan moving forward is to send weekly email updates about research re-engagement to U-M faculty and staff with active sponsored research.

Stay safe and healthy.

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