To: Penn Community

From: Dawn Bonnell, Vice Provost for Research

Date: March 10, 2020

Re: Research Continuity during the COVID-19 Outbreak

As the situation regarding the COVID-19 outbreak evolves, the university is maintaining a suite of resources to support the Penn community. Updates, recent communications with recommendations on university activities, as well as helpful fact-based information can be found in the link on the Penn home page. The website can be found here.

First and foremost, the wellbeing of the Penn community and their families are an important concern and Human Resources has launched a website containing frequently asked questions, guidance on pay and leave scenarios, and remote work guidelines. The website can be found here.

The continuity of research through potential regional impact of an outbreak requires specific considerations. While we hope contingency measures will not be required, preparedness minimizes impact if they become necessary.

The Office of Vice Provost for Research and its reporting offices have a strategy for maintaining essential functions in the case of a significant reduction in workforce or institutional closure. Many of our functions can be managed remotely and we have confirmed that our connections and communication networks are functional. Some essential functions, such as those in University Laboratory Animal Resources (ULAR) and Environmental Health and Radiation Safety (EHRS), cannot be moved off campus. Staff in these departments are designated essential personnel and are required to work during institutional closures. Each office has a detailed plan to maintain critical functions through a series of escalated challenges.

For example, in the event of a significant reduction in workforce:

- EHRS has prioritized emergency response, chemical waste disposal and radiation safety operations and will continue to provide research safety consultations, protocol review, and proposal development remotely. Noncritical functions such as lab inspections and in-person trainings will be provided as resources permit.
- ULAR will prioritize animal care and wellness and may need to delay or reduce optional functions. ULAR staff who are trained in animal care can be re-deployed to husbandry if necessary and staff will be shifted between vivarial locations to ensure coverage.
- The Office of Research Services (ORS), the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the Office of Animal Welfare (OAW) and the Penn Center for Innovation (PCI) will be continuing normal operations with the ability to function remotely.   There should be no disruption in service related to the submission of proposals, protocols, etc. though some processes might be slower than normal due to remote operations.

<u>Research Lab Continuity Planning</u>

If you haven't discussed research continuity with your team recently, now is a good time to develop or revisit laboratory contingency plans. Research activities vary dramatically across campus, so the most effective plans will be developed by research groups. Consider the following in your discussions:

- Encourage practices that minimize transmission and support the health of researchers: hand washing, sufficient rest and hydration, social distancing, and encouraging people to stay home when ill.
- Consider the vulnerability of supply chains:
  - Order critical materials now
  - Ensure that standard reagents and supplies are at a sufficient level to last a couple of months
- Consider coordinating research activities such that essential functions can be managed with fewer researchers in the lab, if necessary. In some research environments designating 1-2 researchers as essential personnel and emergency contacts might an effective management mechanism.
- Consider encouraging those writing papers or dissertations or conducting other non lab research activities to work at home, reducing the number of people commuting and in the lab.
- Consider issues related to information security in the context of working remotely. Many data sets require privacy and security protections that might preclude remote access without special accommodation.
- Prioritize research activities and identify those that can be paused or delayed, if necessary.
- Develop plans to address potential challenges with critical equipment, such as liquid nitrogen dewars, freezers, and incubators.
- Establish a robust communication network for your group, consider having redundant email accounts for critical researchers.
- Review contact information to university partners (such as those within Public Safety, ULAR, EHRS, or ORS, etc).
- Test remote computer and device connections to enable effective work off-site in advance of the need to rely on them. These would include remote desk top, VPN, Zoom, Skype and other applications that support collaboration. Testing is especially relevant for those not regularly using remote access tools.