

Resiliency in Animal Research Operations

Operations and Management Impacts



Biography

Jill Ascher MA, DVM. MPH, DACLAM



Currently:

- NIH Director of Division of Veterinary Resources, (DVR)
- Past Chair of the National Academy of Sciences Roundtable on Science and Welfare of Laboratory Animal Use

Previously:

- U. S. Food and Drug Administration White Oak Animal Program Deputy Director
- Attending Veterinarian in Industry
- 15 years in Private Practice- US, UK and Germany
 - Veterinary Consultant for Livestock Development Group, UK
 - Small Animal Clinics
 - Small Practice Owner-Avian and Exotics House calls in Upper Fairfield County, CT



Emergency Response Plan and Continuity of Service

- **Chain of Command**
 - Tier 1 Staff
 - Senior Staff
 - Considerations for those at greater risk
- **Contingency Planning when Critical Staff Became COVID-19 Positive**
- **Workforce**
 - Keeping staff safe
 - Supporting staff



Travel Authorization



Office of the Attorney General
Washington, D. C. 20530

March 20, 2020

MEMORANDUM FOR ALL UNITED STATES ATTORNEYS

FROM:

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

I want to thank you for all of your hard work during these difficult times. The Department's task of protecting the rights and safety of Americans is even more critical as our country combats the COVID-19 and its pernicious impact on our citizens' lives.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of cities and states have imposed shelter in place and lock down orders or other travel restrictions. We can expect additional orders as the crisis develops. As you know, many federal employees, including Department of Justice employees carrying out law enforcement functions, are at times required to travel for official purposes. In order to ensure that federal employees continue to provide official services to the public, I am directing that all United States Attorneys contact state and local law enforcement leaders in their geographic areas of responsibility to inform them of the following:

- 1) Federal agencies have issued directives addressing the circumstances under which federal employees may travel and commute consistent with CDC guidelines. Federal agencies will continue to monitor and ensure that these directives are followed and modified as appropriate as the situation develops.
- 2) If encountered by local law enforcement during such travel, federal employees shall identify themselves, using their Personal Identity Verification or "PIV" cards, and explain the nature of their work and travel. These cards include a photograph of the employee and list the federal agency for whom the employee works.
- 3) Accordingly, the United States Attorneys should inform their state and local law enforcement partners that we need to ensure that local law enforcement officials enforcing travel restrictions are aware of the fact that federal employees must be allowed to travel and commute to perform law enforcement and other functions and should not be prevented from doing so, even when travel restrictions are in place.

Please also inform the Chief Judge and federal law enforcement partners in your district that Department employees remain able to mobilize as appropriate in order to continue our collective mission.



Vendor Travel Authorization



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service

Date: March XX, 2020
To: Federal, State and Local Law Enforcement Personnel
From: Chief of Police, Director
Re: NIH Critical Personnel and Service Providers

Document Reference Number: _____

National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, Maryland 20892



Office of Research Services

Division of Police

XX XXXX Drive, MSC xxxx
Building

XX, Room XXXX

Bethesda, Maryland 20892-2012

xxx-xxx-xxxx(Office)

xxx-xxx-xxxx(Fax)

The bearer of this letter, _____, has been designated as "Mission Critical" to the National Institutes of Health (NIH). This vendor or service provider has been designated as such because they perform an essential service for the NIH by delivering research materials essential to the national effort in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

The NIH is the U.S. Government's lead agency supporting Biomedical Research. During this National Disaster focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic, it is mission critical for the NIH to conduct research and testing of antiviral medications to develop treatments and therapies for COVID19. The NIH is utilizing the full assets and expertise of both the government and private industry to fill this vital and time critical mission.

This letter is presented as proof that the bearer has a legitimate need to maintain business operations as it supports a mission critical COVID-19 research function to the NIH. The NIH requests the bearer be allowed to continue with critical transports and to conduct business operations in case of road closure, roadblock or federal, state or local closures.

The intent of this letter is not to excuse the bearer of any traffic violations. This letter validates the need of bearer services or materials to the NIH and requests passage and operation in the case of travel restrictions during a government shutdown or a declared state of emergency.

If you have any questions or concerns about the validity of this letter, please contact the NIH Police Emergency Communication Center (ECC) at XXX-XXX-XXXX. Thank you in advance for your assistance and cooperation.

For Chief XXXXX XXXXX, M.S.:

Jill Ascher, Director Division of Veterinary Resources



- **Telework Agreements and Maximum Use of Telework for Telework Eligible Employees**
 - Additional workplace flexibilities for those with dependent care responsibilities
 - Early on reviewed weekly
 - No bringing children to work!
 - Early on gave Weather and Safety Leave if had one or more symptom(s)
 - Fill-out Occupational Medical Service (OMS) Survey
 - Car line
 - Asymptomatic testing
 - Working closely with OMS. Communication with OMS as needed when OMS is ready to issue Return to Work (RTW) Slips



- **Form Team A and Team B**
 - Bethesda:
 - Two teams per building for Animal Care Staff
 - Government Facility Managers covered facilities in 2 teams
 - DVR Veterinary team- 2 teams made-up of 3 veterinarians each
 - Poolesville
 - DVR Veterinary and Facility Teams- Veterinarians, Veterinary Technicians and Care Staff assigned to different facilities/areas
- **On Team A's coverage day each member of Team A (Veterinarians and Facility Managers) covered their own task plus pre-arranged Team B coverage duties and vice versa when Team B was covering**



- **Time saving measures**
 - Lengthening interval for rodent cage changes and spot changes
 - Sanitizing non-human primate (NHP) cages in place rather than wheeling to cagewash
 - Enrichment decrease?
- **Shift to virtual meetings**
- **Focus on studies directly supporting COVID-19 research**



Animal Facility Technical Work in Close Proximity

- **Example: Animal blood collection with assistant**
 - Close-proximity work – Often within 2 feet
 - Administrative controls:
 - No symptoms of COVID-19
 - Physical distancing when possible
 - Required PPE
 - Dedicated facility clothes (scrubs) and shoes
 - Double gloves
 - Shoe covers
 - Surgical mask
 - Surgical cap
 - Lab coat or Tyvek for animal rooms labelled for ABSL2 agents
 - Non-Disposable face shield covering entire face and forehead



Supply Chain Issues

- **Feed and bedding**
 - Communication with suppliers early on
- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**
 - Supply issues
 - Theft
- **Hand sanitizer and soap**
- **Cleaning supplies**
- **Bulk storage**
 - Partnerships on campus. Opened to others



- Coordination with facilities staff during disinfection process
- Need access to animal facilities at all times

SOP XXX

Approved: *Jill Ascher, DVM* Date: 4/3/2020
Director, Division of Veterinary Resources, ORS

Date Issued: 03/20/2020

Date Revised: 4/3/2020

TITLE	: Public Health Emergency Infectious Agent Cleaning and Disinfection
SCOPE	: This procedure applies to all personnel and DVR buildings on the Bethesda and NIHAC campuses
RESPONSIBILITY	: Facility Managers and Contract Managers
PURPOSE	: To establish the process for identifying, clearing, cleaning and disinfecting, and re-opening building locations closed due to exposure of suspected or confirmed disease-causing agent.

IDENTIFICATION OF LOCATIONS

ORS Occupational Medical Service (OMS) will notify DVR of a confirmed COVID-19 infection, including the dates the worker was believed to be shedding the virus. DVR will work with appropriate NIH staff to identify the locations the worker visited during a that period. **See section below on related information for NIH COVID-19 testing procedures*

COMMUNICATIONS

DVR will immediately notify its staff via e-mail and/or telephone, providing the building(s) and room number(s) which the individual visited while shedding the virus. While some literature indicates that the virus dies after three days, DVR will use a conservative 7-day approach in administrative and other non-animal facility areas, unless otherwise directed by DOHS. DVR must also notify any ICs who share the affected space to refrain from entering the space.

CLEARING/SECURING THE LOCATION

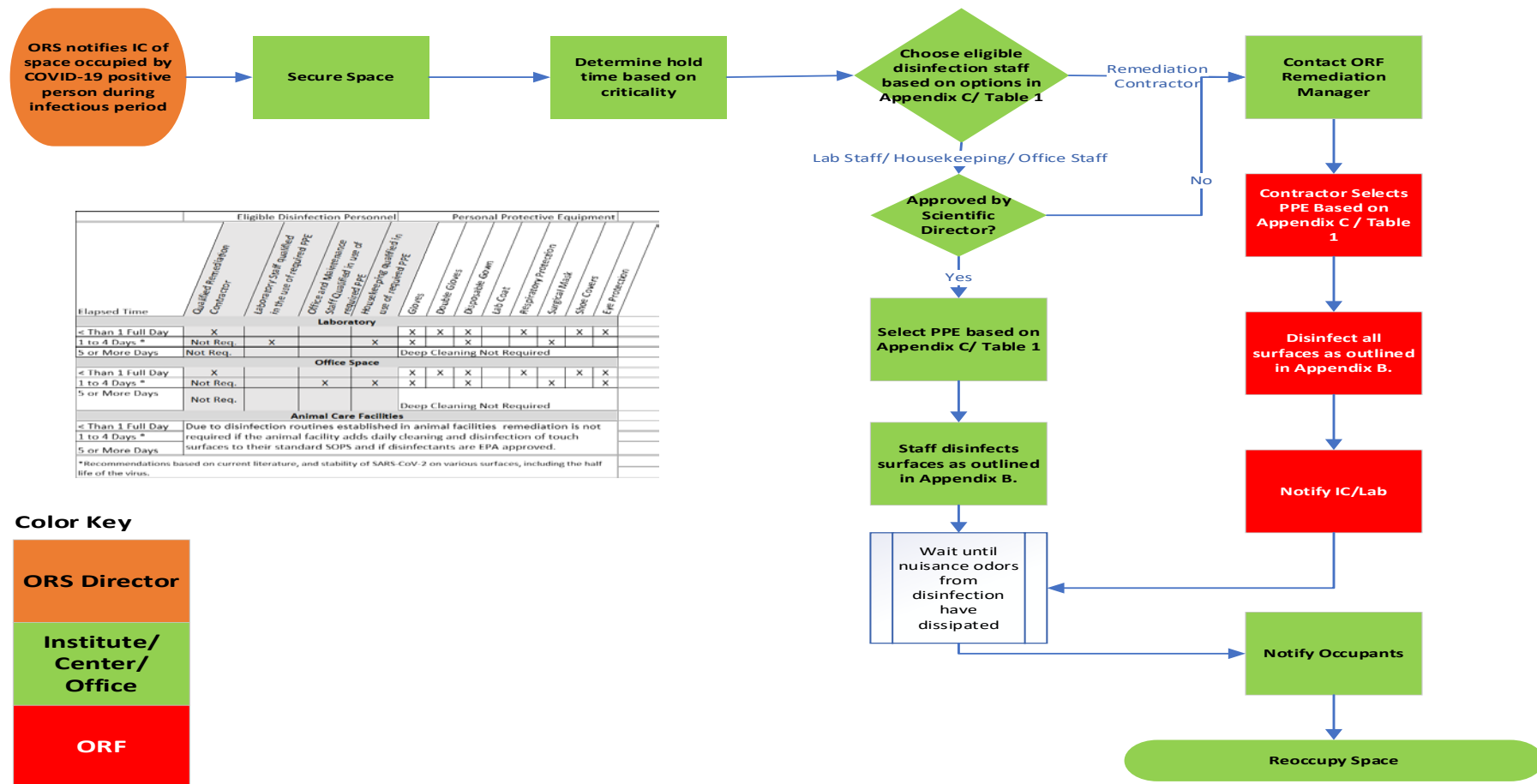
Affected area(s) are vacated by all occupants, the area is locked and secured, and signage with closure details is posted on all entry doors. Access is restricted until the area is cleaned and disinfected in accordance with DVR and NIH requirements and CDC recommendations, and clearance obtained by NIH officials. Staff access to affected animal areas may be granted to authorized personnel only during this time and a modified disinfection plan will be carried out since staff within animal areas wear PPE and are at a decreased risk of spreading infection.

RESPONSE PLAN

The DOHS reviews the space and performs a risk assessment and determines the critical need for re-occupancy. During the review process, areas that are easily sanitized and routinely cleaned/disinfected as per DVR SOPs for sanitation within animal facilities will be assessed to determine the methodology selected for additional cleaning/disinfecting those spaces as necessary. Areas where DVR's everyday cleaning processes have already addressed the "high touch" surface areas that DOHS focuses on may be approved for remediation by DVR personnel.



Figure 1. Disinfection Workflow



DO NOT ENTER
NO ENTRAR

Room Closed Due to Positive COVID-19 Staff
Member

As a Precaution, Room is Closed as of [DATE]

Room will be Cleaned and Reopened at a Later
Date

Please contact your Supervisor for Additional
Instructions

For Emergency Access, Contact
Institute/Center/Office Leadership or your Supervisor

DO NOT ENTER
NO ENTRAR



- **Animal Resources Team (ART)**
 - COVID-19 reference materials
 - Relevant emergency information
 - Emergency contact lists
 - Government closures in the area
 - Subcommittees
 - PPE resources
 - Animal safety/animal testing procedures
 - Support services brainstorming
- **COVID-19 testing set-up by Division of Emergency Management (DEM)**
 - Symptomatic and asymptomatic testing



- **Division of Health and Safety (DOHS) coordinated a COVID-19 vaccination center for NIH employees**
- **Informal vaccine overage program**



- **Frequent email updates**
- **All-Hands virtual meetings**
- **Updated emergency contact cards**
 - Distribute and post
- **Office of Research Services (ORS) Situational Awareness Meetings**
- **ART Meetings**



- **Example of DVR Update Email:**

DVR COVID 19 Update, February 15, 2021:

ORS Situational Meetings:

02-03-2021

02-05-2021

02-10-2021

ART meeting minutes:

<https://www.od.nxxx / xxxxxxxx>

General information for DVR:

- DVR Current C-19 status (subject to constant fluctuations):
- High level Meeting Updates
- Double masking Guidance
- Information on how to find your Vaccine Phase Designation:
- Reminder about Asymptomatic C19 testing on the Bethesda Campus:
- Save the date for NIH Take your child to work day!

Thank you for the important work you do every day!

Jill



• 5 Minute Huddle Each Morning and DVR COVID-19 Data Sheets

Team A

Employee	Job Category	Location	OMS Survey Date	Test Date	Results	Return Date	Notes
Employee A	Admin II	14C	07/08/20	07/04/20	Positive	08/04/20	Tested at Hospital. 7/31/20 received OMS RTW blue slip. Scheduled to be onsite 8/4/20.
Employee E	Admin II	14BN	07/15/20	07/16/20	Negative	07/20/20	Last in office July 8. 7/17/20 received OMS RTW blue slip.
Employee G	Caretaker I	14BN	07/20/20	07/20/20	Negative	08/06/20	Employee was around someone who tested + for COVID. Reported 07.20.20 PM. Last time onsite 07.19.20. Provided OMS survey to fill. OMS directed to self-isolate and quarantine until 8/3/20. RTW 08/06/20
Employee H	Caretaker I	14BN	08/06/20	08/06/20	Cleared, not tested	08/13/20	Employee felt ill and self-reported before reporting to work. OMS instructed to self-monitor for 72 hours and contact OMS on 08/10/20. Cleared to return to work, awaiting RTW from OMS.
Employee N	Admin II	14BN	08/11/20	08/12/20	Negative	08/21/20	Employee teleworks except M & W. Employee is part of contract tracing and testing from Employees I & J. Self-monitoring through 08/19/20, feels fine and will telework from home 5 days/week. Employee will return to site 08/24/20.
Employee Y	PMII	14BNDFG	08/17/20	08/24/20	Negative	08/27/20	Employee traveled to hot spot (FLA). OMS advised testing 7 days after return and then 72 hours asymptomatic.
Employee Z	FSSI-T	14A/H	08/28/20	N/A	Cleared, not tested	09/3/20	Employee became ill at work. Sent home and directed to fill OMS questionnaire. Work areas and locker room were disinfected. Scheduled to be onsite 9/3/20.
Employee A2	FSSI-S	14A/H	08/29/20	09/01/20	Positive	09/17/20	Employee self-reported due to being in contact with + individual in family (not a co-worker).
Employee B2	FSSI-R	14A/H	08/29/20	09/2/20	Positive	09/17/20	Employee self-reported due to being in contact with + individual in family (not a co-worker).
Employee C2	FSSI-J	14C	09/01/20	09/02/20	Negative	09/09/20	Employee self-reported 09/01/20. Filling OMS survey 09/01/20. Last on site 08/30/20.



Planning Required Once Researchers Were Allowed Back Into Animal Facilities

- **Division of Health and Safety (DOHS) space assessments-250 sq. ft. per individual, per room**
 - Plexiglas barriers
- **Room signage**
 - Maximum number allowed, like signage on shop doors
- **Procedure room access sign-up for researchers**
- **Enough staff to get the work done?**
 - Shifted from split to staggered shifts



- **Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**
- **Support group set-up by ART**
- **Travel paperwork**
- **Paying close attention to staff**
 - Split shifts, staggered shifts, working in close quarters
 - Boosting morale
 - Spot checks to ensure proper distancing and proper wearing of PPE
 - Put up Plexiglas and continued distancing
 - Collaboration with Division of Amenities and Transportation Services (DATS) for opening of a large cafeteria seating area to ensure safe distancing during breaks
 - Discussions on how to encourage staff to embrace vaccination
- **Checking in with Technical and Animal Care Staff**
 - Training concerns
 - Staff retention



Planning Committee

Joyce Cohen

Associate Director, Division of Animal Resources
Yerkes National Primate Research Center

Associate Professor, Division of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences
Emory University School of Medicine

Michael “Mike” Huerkamp

Professor, Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine
Director, Division of Animal Resources and Attending Veterinarian
Emory University

David Kurtz

Veterinary Staff Scientist and Head, Quality Assurance Laboratory, Comparative Medicine, NIEHS

Joseph T. Newsome

Associate Professor of Pathology
Director, Division of Laboratory Animal Resources, Health Sciences
Director, UPMC Hillman Cancer Center Animal Facility
University of Pittsburgh

Brianna Skinner

Senior Regulatory Veterinarian, Office of Countermeasures and Emerging Threats
U.S. Food and Drug Administration



Thank you!

NAS Roundtable on Science and Welfare in Laboratory Animal Use Staff

Teresa J. Sylvina

Director, Strategic Initiatives on Animal Research

Director, Institute for Laboratory Animal Research (ILAR)

Director, NAS Roundtable on Science and Welfare in Laboratory Animal Use

Ella Blue – Program Assistant

Margaret Benny Klimek – Program Officer

Courtney Devane – Administrative Coordinator

Eric Edkin – IT Support



**Thank You to the Dedicated NIH Division of
Veterinary Resources Staff Who Have Worked
Tirelessly to Continue Supporting the NIH
Mission During This
Challenging Time!**

