

Colleagues,

After discussion with university leadership, the Cumming School of Medicine (CSM) would like to provide some broad guidance for the use of masks during research activity in the CSM footprint. This is pertinent for completion of laboratory safety plans for researchers who have been granted a research exemption.

The issue of mask use in non-medical settings is complicated and controversial. The university has very carefully reviewed this matter through the Crisis Management Team where legal and human resources (HR) considerations are taken into account, and has taken the firm decision to remain fully in line with the provincial directive on the use of non-medical masks in non-medical settings. The provincial directive is in keeping with the World Health Organization (WHO) and Public Health Agency of Canada recommendations. The updated WHO document is attached, with key points shown in Table 2 on page seven.

The notion of principal investigator (PI) based leadership in workplace safety plans is meant to empower PIs to develop local standards and practices. Each PI can and should develop their own tailored safety plan for their specific context, and this extends to core facilities.

Key points:

- There is an important difference between *mandatory* mask use, a recommendation to wear masks and a suggestion to consider wearing a mask.
- Masks should be worn when physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- People who are medically vulnerable should strongly consider wearing masks.
- If a PI feels that their lab is unsafe and not amenable to social distancing requirements, these PIs may want to hold off on reopening or implement rotating shifts when possible.

Writing a safety plan that makes it *mandatory* to wear masks for COVID-19 protection is not advised. Some of the downsides of wearing masks are articulated in the WHO guidelines, and PIs would be going beyond official provincial recommendations. There are also HR implications for imposing regulations that go beyond provincially mandated rules.

Although this message deals specifically with wearing masks, similar considerations may apply to other aspects of laboratory and office safety. In general, the CSM recommends that laboratory safety plans

should be aligned as much as possible with university guidelines that have been developed based on provincial government directives.

We encourage any PI who has specific concerns that are not addressed by these guidelines to email us at zamponi@ucalgary.ca or cello@ucalgary.ca, or Dr. Paul Schnetkamp, PhD, at pschnetk@ucalgary.ca.

Best wishes,

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