MESSAGE SENT ON BEHALF OF DR SHARI BAUM

Dear colleagues:

As you will have recently learned, the Quebec government has informed universities that it will soon permit the gradual ramp-up of research activities. We do not currently know the timeline for this, although a progressive re-opening may begin as early as 4 May. It is very important that we plan for this complex process.

Whereas we do not yet know what conditions the University (or public health authorities) will establish, we anticipate that physical distancing will need to be maintained, leading to a reduced number of individuals present in our labs and buildings simultaneously. I have copied below some guidelines that were agreed upon by the Research and Graduate Studies committees of the AFMC last week.

Below the AFMC guidelines, I have indicated some potential strategies that we believe individual investigators, departments, research centres and core facilities should consider as means of implementing a gradual re-entry to labs. Obviously, the nature of your research activities will dictate which of these implementation strategies may be feasible.

We suggest that you begin to consider how you would prioritize those research projects that should be re-started first, as well as which members of your lab are in the best position to return to the lab earlier in the gradual re-entry process. Please bear in mind that we will need to follow the guidelines established by the University and public health authorities, as well as the timeline that these groups may outline. Nonetheless, it is important to be prepared.

As soon as we have more details, we will update you and the Faculty’s research community and host a town hall to share parameters, ideas and best practices. In the interim, please note that there is a Telemachus drop-in event planned for this Wednesday, 29 April, 3:30-4:30pm, at which this topic will be discussed (https://mcgill.zoom.us/j/218454532).

Please feel free to share this memo with your faculty members.

Best regards and stay well.

Shari
Guiding Principles

1. Faculty, Staff and Trainees/Post-Grad Trainees safety is paramount.
2. The COVID-19 environment must be stable and decreasing in prevalence.
3. Staff and Students should remain off-site unless actively conducting research.
4. Faculty and Departments can shut down laboratories, floors or buildings as required.
5. Faculties will work collaboratively with their VP Research to oversee re-opening research.

Parameters for re-opening and sustaining open University Research Programs in time of COVID-19

1. Sustained low prevalence or declining COVID-19 prevalence in the community.
   Rationale – defines a state where COVID-19 is no longer a spreading epidemic

2. Daily screen for risk exposure review, symptoms, and temperature check prior to going on site.
   Rationale – allows one to screen for active infection in a person
   Strategies include:
   1. Self-monitoring at home and daily log
   2. Limit access point for building access – Individuals screened for risk exposure, symptoms +/- temperature at point of entry with power to deny entry

3. Rapid availability (i.e. <24hours) COVID-19 testing on risk exposed or symptomatic people
   Rationale – allows one to r/o active infection in a person (i.e. assumes system capacity)

4. Minimize or eliminate COVID-19 exposure to and from the work environment
   Rationale – allows one to avoid contaminating both home and work environments
   Strategies include:
   1. Minimizing public transit and car pooling
   2. PPE – even self-made masks.
5. Maintain a COVID-19 free environment in offices and laboratories

Rationale – need to have all staff and research environments to be reliably COVID-19 free

Strategies include:
1. Physical distancing and regular hand washing
2. Staggered staff at work (i.e. if not in lab should be off campus)
3. Limiting who can be in lunch space at a given time to ensure physical distancing
4. Wiping down surfaces before and after use (i.e. lunchroom, conference room, lab bench).

6. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) use in the offices and laboratories as recommended by Public Health Guidelines.

SUGGESTED IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES AND CONSIDERATIONS (in addition to above)

1. Face-to-face human participant studies cannot be undertaken unless 2m distancing can be maintained. Consider plexiglass barriers, PPE, online studies where possible. (Establish Plan B for student projects that can’t be accommodated.)

2. Core facilities must adjust schedule to ensure minimum 2m distancing at all times. Same for other shared spaces (TC rooms, freezer farms, equipment rooms, etc). (A reasonable estimate may be 1 person per 16sqm of space without PPE.)

3. Plan shifts as appropriate for your situation/nature of research (2 weeks work, 2 weeks home; half days...)

4. Consult/coordinate with others on same floor/using same platforms.

5. Coordinate with CMARC to avoid too many people simultaneously.

6. Set priorities within lab (e.g., students on verge of completion; upcoming grant deadlines; access without public transit).

7. Plan for ordering supplies (including PPE) with ample advance notice.

8. Consider entry/exit routes to the building (staircases, elevators, etc).

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