



Safety Note

25 March 2020

Physical distancing in laboratories and practical learning settings – reducing the transmission of COVID-19

What is physical distancing

Physical distancing includes ways to stop or slow the spread of infectious diseases. It means less contact between you and other people.

Why is it important?

Physical distancing is important because COVID-19 is most likely to spread from person-to-person through:

- direct close contact with a person while they are infectious or in the 24 hours before their symptoms appeared;
- close contact with a person with a confirmed infection who coughs or sneezes, or
- touching objects or surfaces (such as door handles or tables) contaminated from a cough or sneeze from a person with a confirmed infection, and then touching your mouth or face.

So, the more space between you and others, the harder it is for the virus to spread.

What you should do?

If you are sick, stay away from others and stay at home – that is the most important thing you can do.

You should also practise good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene:

- wash your hands frequently with soap and water, or use alcohol-based hand sanitiser, before and after eating, after going to the toilet and after sharing items;
- cover your cough and sneeze, dispose of tissues immediately, and wash your hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitiser; and
- avoid close contact with others (i.e. stay more than 1.5 metres away from people, ensure 4 square metres (sqm) per person in enclosed spaces).

These simple, common sense actions help reduce risk to you and to others. They will help to slow the spread of disease in the community – and you can use them every day.

Principles for physical distancing while attending research laboratories:

- Firstly - Stay at home if you are sick, or are directed self-isolate by QLD Public Health.
- Reduce opportunities for direct transmission e.g. sharing items, unnecessary touching.
- Ensure impeccable personal and laboratory hygiene practices.
- Ensure the correct use of personal protective equipment.

Principles for physical distancing while attending teaching laboratories:

- Firstly - Stay at home if you are sick, or are directed self-isolate by QLD Public Health.



- Practise reasonable physical distancing which, in this case, means avoiding unnecessary close contact with others attempting to keep a distance of at least 1.5m between people when you are on university sites.
- The maximum number of students allowed to attend will be calculate based on the size of the laboratory or workspace to ensure each student has 4sqm of physical space.
- Reduce other opportunities for direct transmission e.g. sharing items, unnecessary touching.
- Ensure impeccable personal and laboratory hygiene practices.
- Ensure the correct use of personal protective equipment.

Principles for physical distancing while attending practical or problem based learning sessions:

- Firstly - Stay at home if you are sick, or are directed self-isolate by QLD Public Health.
- Practise reasonable physical distancing where ever possible, avoiding unnecessary close contact with others attempting to keep a distance of at least 1.5m between people.
- The maximum number of students allowed to attend will be calculate based on the size of the laboratory or workspace to ensure each student has 4sqm.
- Where reasonable physical distancing is not possible, everyone involved must practice impeccable personal hygiene and not participate in these activities if sick or have been in close contact with someone reasonably thought to be infectious.
- Reduce opportunities for direct transmission e.g. sharing items, unnecessary touching.
- Ensure impeccable personal hygiene practices.

Recommendations / Actions

1. Most importantly, stay home if you feel ill, or are directed self-isolate by QLD Public Health.
2. Consider spacing within the physical environment. Maintain 1.5m between you and others and ensure each person has 4sqm of space around themselves.
3. Ensure shared or communal equipment is decontaminated/ cleaned thoroughly between users (use 70% ethanol spray or bactericidal wipes impregnated with at least 70% ethanol to clean equipment).
4. Turn away from others when sneezing or coughing and ensure you cough or sneeze into your elbow or into a tissue, then dispose of the tissue immediately.
5. Wash your hands often with soap and water or use hand sanitiser – especially before and after using shared equipment.
6. Ensure you use any personal protective equipment required for the task and/or as instructed.
7. If possible, consider if new projects should be commenced if they are unable to be suspended or disrupted.
8. If there is limited space to distance from others, consider if work days or work hours can be staggered.

Resource and links

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-information-on-physical-distancing>

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