



Safety Note

Updated: 6 July 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 or awaiting COVID-19 test results, stay away from others and stay at home – that is the most important thing you can do.

You should also practise good personal 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;
- cough and sneeze into your elbow or a tissue, 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 to the extent possible, do not share items).

Supervisor's Advice and Responsibility

For all instances in this safety note the basic principles of physical distancing and hygiene apply:

- ensure there is 1.5m distance between people to the extent possible;
- hand hygiene including frequent hand washing and use of hand sanitiser; and
- ensure shared equipment has been cleaned between users.

Physical distancing in teaching spaces has been assessed and room capacities have been adjusted during the timetabling process.

If the physical distancing requirements are difficult to maintain then:



- The leader of the activity or task must complete a risk assessment to identify COVID transmission hazards, risks of transmission and identify and implement elimination or mitigation measures to protect the health and safety of all participants. The risk evaluation of training required as opposed to the risk to health must be considered and approval for the continuation of the work/training/teaching sought.
- As part of the risk assessment, the use of masks may be considered where there is sustained unavoidable close contact between people. For example, a supervisor instructing a person how to use a specialised piece of equipment.
- If masks are part of mitigating the risk, general mask training and management must apply. For any type of mask, appropriate use and disposal are essential to ensure that they are effective and to avoid any increase in transmission

Principles for physical distancing while attending research and teaching laboratories:

- Firstly - Stay at home if you are sick, are awaiting COVID-19 test results or are directed self-isolate by QLD Public Health.
- Practise reasonable social distancing to the extent possible, this means avoiding unnecessary close contact with others and attempting to keep a distance of at least 1.5 metres between people.
- Reduce other opportunities for direct transmission e.g. sharing items, unnecessary touching.
- Ensure impeccable personal and laboratory hygiene practices.
- Wipe down your bench space and equipment used at the end of the session, or if you are required to share equipment, after you have used it.
- Ensure the correct use and disposal of personal protective equipment.
- Follow the instructions of your supervisor.

Principles for physical distancing while attending practical or problem-based learning (PBL) sessions:

- Firstly - Stay at home if you are sick, are awaiting COVID-19 test results or are directed self-isolate by QLD Public Health.
- Practise reasonable social distancing to the extent possible by avoiding unnecessary close contact with others and attempting to keep a distance of at least 1.5 metres between people.
- 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.
- Wipe down your bench space and equipment used at the end of the session, or if you are required to share equipment, after you have used it.
- Follow the instructions of your supervisor.

Recommendations / Actions

1. Most importantly, stay home if you feel ill, or are directed self-isolate by QLD Public Health – you must not come to campus if you are awaiting COVID-19 test results.
2. Consider spacing within the physical environment to maintain 1.5 metres between you and others to the extent possible.



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. Wipe down any equipment that you have used, and at the end of the session wipe down your work area.
7. Ensure you use any personal protective equipment required for the task and/or as instructed.
8. If possible, consider if new projects should be commenced if they are unable to be suspended or disrupted.
9. If there is limited space to distance from others, consider if workdays or work hours can be staggered.

Resource and links

Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. <https://www.health.gov.au/resources>

Chief Health Officer public health directions - <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/system-governance/legislation/cho-public-health-directions-under-expanded-public-health-act-powers>