

August 19th, 2020



Attention AARC Users:

As part of the ongoing efforts to mitigate the possibility of COVID-19 transmission while still supporting research at The University of Alabama, the AARC has made many changes to normal operation. Thank you for your patience and continued support of the AARC during this time. As we approach the beginning of the fall semester, the Office for Research & Economic Development (ORED) has announced that **effective August 3rd, 2020** all UA's Research Activity in all spaces, internal and external to the University, included dry and wet laboratories, studios, and other spaces, will begin to operate under Modified Full Operations.

Critical to this change in operation are the return to work requirements (i.e. training, testing, symptom tracking, etc.), all of which must be satisfied for all employees and students as a prerequisite to qualify for continuing or resuming any research activity under the Guidelines set forth in the University's Plan for a [Return to Full Operations](#), and the UA System's most current [Comprehensive Health and Safety Plan](#).

In order to minimize risk to research personnel, the AARC is updating and reviewing current policies and creating a Research Activity Plan for all AARC lab spaces. This plan is subject to updates as we move forward through the coming months. The AARC will continue to endeavor to follow best practices to protect both users and staff, and we thank you for your patience and patronage.

Regarding AARC Access and Reservations:

- **The AARC Reservation Policy** is still in effect. This entails:
 - **No more than one reservation per project per instrument.**
 - **New reservations may be made upon the completion of the current reservation.**
 - **Users may book time between 8-12:30pm, or 12:30-5pm. Reservations made between these blocks (e.g. 10-2pm) will be cancelled or rescheduled.**
 - **Shorter reservations (e.g. 8-10am) are permitted, with the next reservation ending by 12:30 or beginning in the afternoon block.**
 - Users attempting to reserve time near the end of these blocks (e.g. 4pm) may be asked to reschedule.
 - Ongoing experiments that require a longer duration, as in running past 5pm, maybe permitted with the appropriate AARC staff member oversight and prior approval.
 - **24-hour users are urged to take advantage of that status and work after hours when possible.** With a significant backlog of research, maximizing daytime access to new trainees and 8-hour users is critical. Safety procedures must be followed by users while in AARC during all hours; periodic checking will occur to ensure that users adhere to the COVID-19 access requirements.
- Users should use the [Access Request](#) link on the [AARC website](#) if laboratory access is still restricted.
- Users and staff are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the [Health and Safety](#) guidelines outlined in the UA Return Plan.

AARC Research Activity Plan

Central to working under Modified Full Operations is the mitigation of risk to both users and employees. Some existing AARC policy will carry forward, while some additional policy will be adopted based upon the Guidelines linked above.

- **In order to access the AARC, an initial proof of [Test+Train+Check](#) compliance is required.** Users who have not completed any of the steps for this program, or who have a test status of “Not Compliant”, will be denied entry to the facility until their results have been received and all fields are marked “Compliant”. Users who visit the AARC without having received test results, regardless of the result, may have access restricted or removed.
- **Users will need to provide a “Cleared” Passport, provided by [UA Healthcheck](#), in order to attend in-person training or access instrumentation.**
- **Only one (1) user will be allowed at an instrument operation panel at any one time.** In order to promote physical distancing, indicators of a six-foot radius or distance will be placed near each instrument. In the event that physical distancing is not possible, both users and staff should limit the amount of close contact between individuals.
- **Groups of no more than three (3) people will be allowed in any one lab space.** This applies to both staff and users. For example, one AARC staff member may train two users who maintain a six-foot distance as marked on the floor. During such training positions may change, with a user at an instrument and staff six feet away. **Close, shoulder to shoulder contact at desks will not be permitted.**
- **Because of the above limitation, tours will be given using lab bay windows with no large groups in the AARC.** Please contact AARC staff in advance of your arrival, and a staff member can be available for handouts, explanations, and questions.
- **The use of a face mask or covering is required at all times in the AARC. This mask must cover both the mouth and nose at all times and remain on at all times.** Users are also encouraged to wear gloves and [periodically wash their hands](#). If a user does not have this personal protective equipment (PPE), please contact the AARC staff prior to arrival.
- **Instrument training will be conducted remotely via Team Viewer or Zoom and in a limited capacity in-person.** Any in-person training must adhere to previously mentioned guidelines.
- **Users may not bring non-UA employees or collaborators to the AARC.** In the event such an activity needs to take place a Research Prohibition Waiver must be written. Lead Investigators for research groups will need to write a justification and submit requests first to their Dean (or designee) for approval, then to the Vice President for Research (or designee) for consideration. The justification should briefly describe the nature of the work, why it is important and justified, and what and how measures will be taken to mitigate risk and protect research personnel, as well as participants, consistent with the UA System’s most current [Comprehensive Health and Safety Plan](#).
- Users are still encouraged to travel between rooms and in and out of labs with haste when possible, while paying attention to their surroundings and the locations of other users in the facility.
- Rubbing alcohol, gloves, and wipes will be provided on carts at the entrance to each lab. **Users should actively wipe down commonly touched surfaces (e.g. countertops, keyboards & mice, desks, etc.) prior to and after using equipment.** Staff will also be on site to wipe down commonly touched surfaces and should do so after each reservation is complete.

In the Event of Exposure

- From [UA Health Info](#): **All faculty, staff, and students must report COVID-positive test results and suspected exposure to the COVID Support Program and follow its instructions, including isolation and quarantine. Their number is 205-348-2819 (205-348-CV19).**
 - Exposure is defined by the CDC as being near a COVID positive person for greater than 15 minutes, within 6 feet, and without proper PPE such as a mask.
 - When contacting the Support Program, it can be beneficial to call early in the day.
- AARC staff will notify Manager/Director of possible exposure, who will in turn notify the COVID Call Center.
- Users should notify AARC staff as well as their advisors of possible exposure.
- **Users and staff must be free of [all serious symptoms potentially related to COVID-19](#) to enter the AARC.** Users or staff who appear to have any of these symptoms may be asked to leave and follow established UA procedure detailing when to return.
- **If individuals are symptomatic, they should not enter the AARC and should follow the above procedures.**
 - Self-isolate, notify advisor/supervisor, and call the COVID Support Program. The Support Program should then direct testing and tracing.
- **Users who have been in direct contact with COVID positive individuals should not enter the AARC and should follow the above procedures.**
 - Refer to the CDC definition for exposure above and contact the COVID Support Program for questions or assistance.
- **Users who have been in secondary contact (e.g. contact with a person who may have been in direct contact with a COVID positive individual) should do the following:**
 - Monitor symptoms daily using Healthcheck, including temperature.
 - If symptoms develop, contact advisor/supervisor and COVID Support Program and do not enter the AARC.
 - Continue to physically distance and use PPE, including masks and gloves.
 - Routinely clean hands as well as commonly touched objects (keys, phone, etc.).
 - Clean commonly touched areas in office or laboratory settings.
- With regards to symptoms and the Healthcheck tool:
 - In the event of a high-risk status, either from symptoms or contact with a COVID positive individual, **do not enter the AARC.** Contact your advisor to initiate dialogue with the COVID Support Program.
- **The UA System has developed an app for exposure notification and Healthcheck capabilities that is highly encouraged for use.** [The GuideSafe Exposure Notification App \(www.guidesafe.org\)](http://www.guidesafe.org) is voluntary and anonymous to use. Encrypted Bluetooth messages transmit between devices to facilitate exposure notification without identification of an individual.
- **[Faculty, staff, and students must not return to campus until receiving written clearance from either Employee Health \(faculty & staff\) or Student Health \(students\).](#)**
 - The COVID Support Program can help to arrange testing needed for reentry.
- HR Contacts for advisors/supervisors:
 - Faculty: Joel Brouwer, Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs
 - Staff: Sharon Hale, Senior HR Partner
 - Students: Dr. Steven Hood, Associate Vice President of Student Life