

Response for COVID-19 Positive test or COVID Pass Warning During Research Ramp-up

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Introduction

This writeup is aimed at PI's, Core facility leaders, and DLC Heads (referred to as "Research Leaders") and provides guidance in the case a member of your team tests positive for COVID-19 or receives another type of warning from the COVID Pass system. MIT Medical, EHS, and facilities have processes for handling medical care, contact tracing, cleaning, and other necessary steps. A Research Leader's primary task in the event of a COVID Pass warning is communicating information provided to them by MIT Medical to those who require it and to provide comfort to their research group as appropriate.

In anticipation that MIT students and employees will report symptoms, contact with known positives, and test positive themselves for the SARS-CoV-2 virus, this document lays out a response that accommodates the colleague who might have fallen ill and the surrounding community. In order of priority, the principles of our response are,

1. Protecting the community
2. Caring for the ill
3. Minimizing disruption to research

Symptom Reporting

Each researcher must enter their symptoms as well as whether they have had contact with known COVID-19 patients on the Daily Health Attestation each day before coming to MIT. After filling out the Attestation, the researcher will either be issued a valid COVID Pass for the day, indicating they may come to MIT as planned, or they will be issued a warning message that they should stay home and await a phone call from MIT Medical. Someone who tests positive during COVID-19 regular testing will also be contacted directly from MIT Medical.

With the issuance of a COVID Pass, the researcher, and their Research Leader will receive an email from MIT Medical, indicating the researcher is allowed to work at MIT that day. For the warning message or a positive test result, only the researcher will get notified, including that they should await further instructions from MIT Medical. MIT Medical will also advise the Research Leader on the next steps to follow, including what to communicate with their group. Discussions with staff members about the return in these situations can be sensitive, and Research Leaders are encouraged to review the Legal-Ethical-Equity (LEE) committee document about the topic, which is Appendix 4 of the May 18, 2020 guidance on the research ramp-up (<https://research.mit.edu/sites/research/files/uploads/guidance-mit-dlcs-pis-related-on-campus-research-ramp-up-planning-2020-05-22.pdf>).

Communication within the Research Leader's Group

Based on guidance from MIT Medical, the Research Leader should consider what to communicate in the event that they are informed that group member tests positive for COVID-19 or receives news of another type of warning. Importantly, the Research Leader should not take it upon themselves to inform their groups or take specific actions without direct instructions from MIT Medical.

Group members may have questions for the Research Leader, who should answer them as best they can or refer the interlocutor to the MIT Medical website (<https://medical.mit.edu>). The Research Leader should reassure members of their groups with questions that MIT Medical will contact them if necessary.

Circumstances will arise that are not covered by this Response Plan, and in those cases, the Research Leader should seek the guidance of MIT Medical, their Dean or Department, Lab, or Center Head.

Contact Tracing

In response to a positive virus test or other type of warning, MIT Medical will coordinate with the individual and, where necessary and appropriate, the Research Leader to establish possible contacts over the previous several days. The work schedules filled out in the Exercise B spreadsheets may provide a starting point, and the Research Leader should provide any additional contact information if asked. Research Leaders should consider establishing a lab-wide policy of keeping a log of daily contacts – a record of contacts can help tracing later.

Laboratory and Workspace Remediation

Depending on subsequent tests, the workspaces of a researcher who test positive for COVID-19 may need cleaning. MIT Medical will coordinate the necessary cleaning protocol with the Department of Facilities and EHS. The specific nature of the cleaning process will be worked out on a case by case basis. The workspaces should not open until any required cleaning has been completed, and MIT Medical and EHS have determined that the spaces should be reoccupied. The Research Leader should not arrange cleaning unless asked explicitly to by MIT Medical, facilities, or EHS.

Summary

The systems put in place by MIT Medical, Facilities, and EHS provides direction to the Research Leader and their group in the event of a positive SARS-CoV-2 positive test or suspected exposure. Following their guidance will facilitate contact tracing, any necessary cleaning of spaces, and adjustment of work plans as needed. These situations can be stressful, and Research Leaders will need to provide leadership for their groups to follow the guidance from MIT to allow the situation to be resolved in a fashion that maximizes the safety of the community and allows research to continue where and when possible.