

Updated Guidance for Laboratory- and Non-laboratory-based Research at MIT (June 14, 2021)

On June 7, 2021, MIT released new guidance regarding use of space on campus for the summer. Note that these policies may be updated over the course of the summer. The major changes are as follows:

Capacity and physical distancing requirements in research spaces and offices. Capacity limits (i.e., how many people per room) and physical distancing (i.e., how much distance between people) requirements in research spaces and offices have been removed. For work activities, these spaces can be used at the capacity available in pre-pandemic conditions, based on fire code regulations. Note that there are still certain guidelines on physical distancing while eating (see below). Group meetings, in-person seminars, and department meetings are allowed.

Importantly, individual Departments/Labs/Centers (DLCs), Principal Investigators (PIs), Research Core Facilities and research supervisors may choose to impose more strict capacity and physical distancing guidelines for space that is assigned to them. In contrast, Institute-shared and common spaces such as building restrooms, elevators, and hallways (generally assigned to MIT Facilities) are under the same MIT guidance in all buildings across campus; similar spaces in MIT-leased buildings such as NE47 follow the corresponding building landlord guidance that will continue to be posted and communicated to the MIT community members who are assigned space in those buildings.

With the lifting of building and room capacity limits and physical distancing limits, earlier guidance that those who can work from home should work from home no longer applies. DLCs can now authorize all members, regardless of type of work, to access lab and office space. As per the May 17 guidance from Ramona Allen, VP for HR, decisions about who can and should return to work on-site this summer “will be made at the department or unit level in consultation with supervisors and based on job requirements, team needs, safety considerations – and how a role can best serve to advance the Institute’s mission.”

While MIT is now removing signage regarding COVID capacity and physical distancing indoors and outdoors in Institute-wide shared spaces, each DLC’s Departmental Monitoring and Compliance Committee (DMC; established in 2020 to facilitate and monitor COVID policy related use of campus space for a DLC) should discuss with their DLC members when to remove signage from office, lab, and meeting room doors. Those signs posted by DLCs will be removed by those DLCs. (This is why you may still see such capacity limit signs on interior doors, signs, or digital monitors as you move about campus.)

Common spaces. Conferences rooms and classrooms can now be used at full capacity, except when masks are not being worn due to eating. Elevators and restrooms can be used at pre-

pandemic capacities. At this time, restrooms continue to undergo enhanced cleaning, which means they are cleaned twice per shift by our MIT Custodial Services colleagues.

DLCs may host meetings or events in common spaces on campus up to their capacity limits as determined by fire code regulations. Details about registering guests at such events are available in the [guidance](#). Shared food (e.g., two people sharing a pizza or the serving of a buffet-style lunch) is not allowed at this time, even with adequate physical distancing.

Meals inside. Eating is allowed inside buildings in spaces that were appropriate for eating pre-pandemic. When dining indoors with others at MIT, community members are encouraged to limit the time spent eating together to less than 20 minutes and to limit group size to 4 individuals, who are separated by 6 feet. If several small groups are eating in the same space, it is encouraged that one group be separated from another by 8 feet.

DLCs will need to consider instituting policies related to DLC-managed common space use to ensure that there is enough space to accommodate individuals eating under these constraints, especially during peak meal times. Many DLCs have adopted online scheduling tools or repurposing of existing office or meeting space to facilitate this.

Individuals are encouraged to eat outside whenever possible. [City of Cambridge](#) rules must be observed in outdoor spaces.

As noted above, shared food is still not allowed. The use of shared water coolers, coffee, and other beverage services can be restarted at this time (subject to the guidelines listed above).

Face coverings. Well-fitted face coverings/masks are required inside MIT buildings except when alone in a fully enclosed space or while eating. One recommended approach to observe the intent of the current policy is to keep “masks on ears” if one is alone in a closed-door room such as an office or conference room so that others feel comfortable entering by knowing that you will pull your mask up as soon as you notice them wanting to enter. Of course, for this to work, it’s encouraged that you maintain an awareness of your surroundings (e.g., not sitting with your back to the door while wearing headphones) so you know when someone wants to enter the space.

The mask/face covering policy will be reevaluated as the summer progresses.

Building access and COVID Pass. All MIT employees will still need to continue activating their ID cards daily via COVID Pass, getting tested once per week for COVID, filling out a daily health attestation and entering buildings at the designated access points. However, all access points on campus will now be available to all active COVID Pass holders. See this [map](#) for the locations of access points. Transit between buildings inside is now unrestricted.

Individuals who are not already in the COVID Access system can be entered via the [Exercise B spreadsheet](#) or by entering an individual allocation. Only one primary building on campus must

be entered in section 4 of the Exercise B spreadsheet. There is no need to enter weekly hours or schedules. However, maintaining Exercise B records (of people and at least one assigned building) for those accessing campus remains a recommended best practice for research continuity. Keeping Exercise B lists current allows each DLC and team to respond smoothly to potential future requirements to reduce access due to changes in COVID conditions in the coming weeks.

Building access via COVID Pass requires regular COVID testing at MIT Medical; for individuals living on campus or accessing campus at least once per week, testing is required once per week. For many individuals who have been regularly accessing campus buildings, this represents a reduction in the frequency of testing.

Visitors. Occasional visitors (e.g., collaborators, job candidates, sponsors, etc.) may now enter non-residential campus buildings from any access point if accompanied by an MIT community member (student or appointed employee), who is an active COVID Pass holder. Such visitors must be made aware by their host of the campus guidelines (e.g., masks indoors). The visitor does not need to fill out a health attestation PDF.

There are no changes for the time being to the appointed visitor policy for visiting scientists/scholars, research affiliates and visiting students. Any changes to this policy will be posted on MIT Now.

Unescorted visitors continue to be allowed in outdoor spaces on campus.

Vendors/service providers. It is recommended that regular daily/weekly vendors (e.g., Fedex, Airgas, etc.) continue to be entered in COVID Access under Vendor/Supplier allocation and use COVID Pass.

If a vendor or contracted service provider has a scheduled appointment, they should be in COVID Access if they are on campus regularly (more than once a month) or if their services require extended visits to campus (more than three days), since in these cases it might be challenging for the MIT COVID Pass holder to escort the vendor into and out of the MIT building to complete the service.

Any other vendor with a scheduled appointment, including occasional vendors on campus for one-time training or equipment demonstrations, may follow the escorted visitor rules outlined above.

External Core Facility users. For Core Facility users who do not require building access, contactless drop-off/pick-up continues to be strongly encouraged.

Regular users of Core Facilities should continue to be entered in COVID Access and use COVID Pass. *Occasional Core Facility users* may be treated as escorted visitors (feasibility determined by the Core Facility administration).

Human Subjects Research. MIT has a particular responsibility to ensure the safety of individuals who come to MIT campus to participate as human subjects in COUHES-approved research studies. As such, the new process allowing campus guests to be escorted by MIT researchers or other MIT COVID Pass holders does not apply to human subjects. For now, we continue the existing practice that human subjects (for COUHES-approved studies) are allowed on campus only if they are current COVID Pass holders. Those PIs seeking exceptions to this process should use the research exceptions process managed by the Office of the VP for Research.

MIT is working toward a process to facilitate PIs bringing more human subjects for COUHES-approved studies to campus. This includes MIT IS&T's development of a new digital system, called Tim Tickets. This would facilitate building access in a way that is more consistent with interaction-intensive activities with the MIT community, and facilitate easy awareness of current campus guidelines on public health practices that we would be expected to provide to human subjects coming to campus for approved research. This new system, which would have a broader use than just human subjects, will be piloted and planned for availability later this summer.

Libraries. MIT Libraries will continue to deliver content digitally and (when needed) physically to MIT community members. Two of the Libraries' 24/7 reading rooms are available for self-reservation and use: Barker (10-500) and Dewey (E53) reading rooms are reservable on the "Spaces" feature of Atlas and COVID Pass app. All other library spaces are expected to open to MIT this fall.

Quiet Spaces. Rooms for individual reservation and use remain available through email to building-access@mit.edu. Reduction of capacity limits in all MIT buildings should facilitate access to rooms for all types of academic and research uses this summer. However, those who still need to reserve a private room for individual use (e.g., a Zoom call for an important interview or self-recording of a virtual conference presentation, when their shared office, lab, or home does not provide that environment) can request such reservations through August 2021.

Departmental Monitoring and Compliance Committees (DMCs). DLCs are still required to have a DMC to monitor compliance, continue to meet and be a local resource for staff questions and support. Weekly DMC reports continue to be required for now. The [MIT Hotline](#) is still available for reporting any violations or concerns.