

## Environmental Health &amp; Safety

## SafetyMatters

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## The Importance of the Flu Vaccination During COVID-19

by Kathleen Crowley, Associate Vice President, Environmental Health & Safety

Columbia University and the public health community at large have long recognized that vaccination against seasonal influenza (“the flu”) is the best way to protect ourselves, coworkers, family, patients and friends. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends annual vaccination as the first and most important step in protecting against influenza for everyone 6 months of age and older. A flu vaccine provides individual health benefits, including keeping you from getting sick with flu, reducing the severity of your illness if you do get flu, and reducing your risk of a flu-associated hospitalization. Getting a flu vaccine this fall will be more important than ever, not only to reduce your risk from the flu but also to help conserve potentially scarce healthcare resources during the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, the Columbia community is strongly encouraged to take this important measure to provide a safeguard during flu season.

The flu vaccine is safe and effective, utilizes inactivated or killed viruses, and protects against multiple flu strains. The composition of U.S. flu vaccines is reviewed annually and since there are many different flu viruses which are constantly changing, the composition of the vaccine is updated as needed to match circulating strains. Generally, flu vaccines protect against the three or four viruses (depending on the vaccine) that research suggests will be most common. For 2020-2021, the trivalent (three-component) egg-based vaccines contain: A/Guangdong-Maonan/SWL1536/2019 (H1N1) pdm09-like virus (updated); A/Hong Kong/2671/2019 (H3N2)-like virus (updated); and B/Washington/02/2019 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus (updated). The quadrivalent (four-component) egg-based vaccines, protects against a second lineage of B viruses, and contain the additional B/Phuket/3073/2013-like (Yamagata lineage) virus ([ref. https://www.cdc.gov/flu/season/faq-flu-season-2020-2021.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/season/faq-flu-season-2020-2021.htm))

The seasonal influenza vaccine is available to faculty, staff and students at no cost as follows:

- At Morningside eligible students, faculty, and staff can **schedule an appointment** using the Patient Portal visit [https://health.columbia.edu/flu in Lerner Hall](https://health.columbia.edu/flu-in-Lerner-Hall).
- At CUIMC faculty and staff can visit P&S, Amphitheater 1 Mon. & Wed., 7:30am–12:00pm then 1:15pm–3:45pm or Hammer Bldg., LL205 Tues. & Fri., 7:30am–12:00pm then 1:15pm–3:45pm.
- CUIMC students can go to CUIMC SHS located at 100 Haven for more information go to <https://www.cumc.columbia.edu/student-health/>.
- Influenza information available via NYP at <https://infonet.nyp.org/FLU/Pages/index.aspx>.

## What is the difference between Influenza (Flu) and COVID-19?

Influenza and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. COVID-19 is caused by infection with a new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) and flu is caused by infection with two main types of influenza virus (Types A and B). Because some symptoms of flu and COVID-19 are similar, it may be hard to tell the difference based on symptoms alone, and testing may be needed to help confirm a diagnosis. Read more about the similarities and differences on the CDC COVID-19 website <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/flu-vs-covid19.htm>. To learn more about COVID-19, visit the CDC’s Coronavirus COVID-19 site, and to learn more about flu, visit their Influenza (Flu) homepage. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/index.htm>.

EH&S thanks the Columbia community in advance for supporting this important public health initiative.

When working in the laboratory: eating, drinking or applying cosmetics is prohibited.

Proper work attire (e.g., long pants, closed toe shoes) and PPE (e.g., laboratory coat, gloves and eye protection) must be worn when working in the laboratory.

Remember to periodically flush your laboratory cup sinks and floor drains with water to prevent odors from migrating into your laboratory.

For Lab Fire Safety Prevention tips, check out FDN(wh)Y Me

<https://research.columbia.edu/content/fdnwhy-me>

**Remember!**  
Mask UP!  
Maintain physical distance (at least 6') requirements!  
Wash your hands often!

## Got Lab Junk

by Gabriela Cardoso & Ryan El Naggar, Safety Advisors

While laboratories continue to ramp-up and perform research during these challenging times, EH&S is available to provide active support to the Columbia research community including provision of assistance with laboratory relocations, equipment upgrades, sending equipment out for repair or calibration, or to simply reduce the overall clutter in a laboratory space.

To facilitate the safe and efficient handling of laboratory equipment, EH&S provides two types of clearances: an E-Clearance (electronic clearance) and a Standard Clearance:

- ◆ E-Clearance (electronic clearance) is available for common laboratory appliances at minimal risk for contamination. These items can be cleared by EH&S electronically, via email. When submitting an EH&S Clearance Request Form for equipment that can be cleared electronically, it is important to attach pictures that show the equipment is properly decontaminated by laboratory personnel and/or emptied of chemicals.
- ◆ Standard Clearance is reserved for more contamination-prone and higher hazard equipment. An EH&S standard clearance involves an on-site visit and assessment. This can be arranged by submitting an EH&S Clearance Request Form

Clearance may only be issued after personnel have decontaminated laboratory equipment with a 10% bleach solution followed by 70% ethanol solution. Equipment such as refrigerators must also be emptied prior to clearance.

In addition to individual pieces of equipment, EH&S offers Clearance services for rooms or workspaces, when a laboratory is vacating or moving. Room Clearances are only issued after laboratory personnel have decontaminated all benchtop surfaces with a 10% bleach solution followed by 70% ethanol solution, emptied all cabinets and drawers, and completed the EH&S Procedures for Vacating a Laboratory checklist. The checklist is a comprehensive guide that encompasses the removal of all hazard including physical hazard (sharps) chemical hazards, biological hazards and radioactive hazards.

Before EH&S issues any type clearance, the following hazards must be removed:

- ◆ Biological Hazards -
  - To remove any potentially infectious materials, decontaminate surfaces with 10% bleach solution followed by 70% ethanol solution.
- ◆ Chemical Hazards -
  - Laboratory equipment exposed to chemicals can be decontaminated with soap and water or 70% ethanol solution.
- ◆ Radiation Hazards -
  - Before Clearance can be issued for equipment or space that has been used in conjunction with radioactive materials, EH&S will visit the space to inspect and take wipes of the space and/or equipment.
  - Once the wipes have shown no contamination and all radioactive hazards have been addressed, EH&S will issue clearance.

To submit a Clearance request please use EH&S' Clearance Request Form: <https://research.columbia.edu/laboratory-and-research-safety>, select "Forms & Applications", use your UNI login and select "Laboratory Clearance Request" under *Laboratory/Research Safety*.

For questions regarding clearances please contact [labsafety@columbia.edu](mailto:labsafety@columbia.edu).

## Research Radiation Safety & COVID-19 – Supporting Operations While Reducing Risk

by Sam Dindayal, Health Physicist

EH&S' Radiation Safety team has adjusted and adapted to the new reality of physical distancing and working from home by focusing on minimizing risk while continuing to support the Columbia University research community. The Research Radiation Safety (RRS) team has worked on-site throughout the pandemic and research ramp-down to provide traditional coverage for services such as Radioactive Material (RAM) clearances and RAM package processing.

Notable services provided after the ramp-down of research laboratories included:

- ◆ Collection and return of survey meters for annual calibration
- ◆ RAM waste shipment from CUIMC and LDEO campuses
- ◆ Q3 Radiation dosimeter distribution

Just as most laboratories were suspending operations, some laboratories increased their operations in order to perform critical SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 related research. In support of these research activities, the RRS team, working in on-site rotations, assisted labs with the establishment of new experiments, training, procurement, receipt and disposal of RAM.

As other research activities have begun to return to campus, the RRS team has carefully reviewed its work practices to find opportunities to reduce risk of exposure and prevent infection while still maintaining the highest standards of safety, compliance, and support. One effort has been to re-imagine the quarterly laboratory audit (required as a condition of the University's RAM license) for 'low risk' RAM use laboratories. These laboratories are selected based on current usage of RAM, inventory and past performance. For such laboratories, in place of a traditional in-person RAM audit, a 10 question template is provided in LION to collect records and information that are easily accessible in the lab. Using this data and other information recorded in the LION database, RSS will complete the lab's audit remotely. Through this process, RSS provides a comparable degree of oversight in a way that avoids unnecessary contact or increased density in the laboratory. The team will reassess this remote audit program as the RSS team and the researchers gain experience with it, until the pandemic subsides and a broad return to in-person activities can be safely achieved.

The RRS team can be reached by email at [rso-ehrs@columbia.edu](mailto:rso-ehrs@columbia.edu) for assistance in completing the remote audit template and for radiation safety needs. Additionally, RAM users and laboratories, are kindly requested to locate any unreturned Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 dosimeters, and if found, return them to the dosimetry office as soon as possible.

The RRS team thanks the Columbia research community for using radiation safely in the University's research laboratories.



## EH&S Promotes Healthy Living



Looking for a safer way to get to work and avoid crowds? EH&S staff have been going “Wheels Down” for their commute! While some team members were already riding to work prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, several more have since embraced the open air and social distancing that commuting by bike offers, as well as the additional benefit of a cardio workout! The Department also hosted an optional “Wheels Down” socially distant ride in September – it was a great team building event!

The University offers many safe and convenient options for bike storage on all campuses. EH&S also made space for bikes to be stored during the workday for those who don’t have room in their office or elsewhere.

If you ride, remember to wear your helmet – Safety Always at Columbia and EH&S!

[More information on biking can be found on the Columbia Transportation website!](#)

### Fire Safety Minute

- ◆ Remember to check the batteries in your smoke alarms at least twice a year while changing the clocks for *Daylight Savings Time*.
- ◆ Check the expiration dates on your smoke alarms and make sure to change detectors every 10-years.
- ◆ Talk to your household members and make an emergency action plan in case of fire or other home emergency.
- ◆ Determine a meeting, or muster, point to ensure all household members have safely escaped.

# Smoke Alarms at Home

**SMOKE ALARMS ARE A KEY PART of a home fire escape plan. When there is a fire, smoke spreads fast. Working smoke alarms give you early warning so you can get outside quickly.**



[nfpa.org](http://nfpa.org)

## Safety Never Sleeps

by Stavros Fanourakis, Senior Manager for Research Safety

As the University community worked through the unprecedented pandemic that hit the New York region in the spring of 2020, Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S) maintained a crucial role in the effort to keep Columbia healthy.

While laboratories prepared for a research activity “ramp-down” that has never been seen before, the Safety Advisor team of EH&S maintained a presence (albeit from a 6 foot distance!) in the field, supporting Principal Investigators and assisting laboratory managers with safely pausing non-essential research experiments. During that time, when only a small percentage of researchers were physically in their respective laboratories, the Safety Advisor team offered much needed guidance and necessary services to those conducting approved critical research. With a rapid expansion of the University respiratory protection program, targeted post-approval monitoring visits to confirm the safety of work that includes potentially infectious materials, and the intensification of many other efforts for the safety of the Columbia community, the team showed its commitment to supporting what is greater than all of us - the product of research conducted in Columbia University laboratories.

With a reduction in the prevalence of the virus and a much anticipated “flattening of the curve” in mid-Summer, the University implemented its plans for a gradual “ramp-up” of research activities. EH&S likewise played a central role in the safe reopening of laboratories and the safe return of researchers to the workplace. Maintaining a safe distance and a watchful eye, EH&S Safety Advisors prepared the research community for the resumption of FDNY annual inspections, ensured compliance with Federal and State chemical waste regulations, and continued to advise on safety-related best practices in research spaces.

Today, as we continue our cautious steps towards what some of us distantly remember as “normal”, Safety Advisors are still here, to support safe research. Wearing a bright white laboratory coat with the EH&S insignia and following University guidelines to reduce the spread of the virus, Safety Advisors will continue their crucial work in the field, answering questions, offering assistance, and identifying opportunities for improvement.

Come rain or shine, safety does not sleep; nor does EH&S’ team of dedicated safety professionals.

If you have occasion to encounter a Safety Advisor taking notes in the hallways of a research building, feel free to pause to express your appreciation for their support, or at least wave and smile behind your face covering – they’ll be sure to return the greeting!



6/30/20 Safety Advisor Gabriela Cardoso prepares a student from the VP&S School of Medicine to be fit-tested for an N-95 respirator

## Fogging of Safety Glasses: Causes and Prevention

Fact Sheet #11 by Environmental Health & Safety

### What causes safety glasses to fog up when worn with a face covering?

The fog is a type of condensation that can form when the warm air from your breath escapes through the top of the face covering and touches the cool surface of the safety glasses' lenses.

### How can users prevent safety glasses from fogging up?

- **Fit Face Covering Appropriately:**

- Ensure the face covering fits securely over the nose to minimize warm air escaping up towards the safety glasses.
- Tying the face covering criss-cross or twisting the ear loops can provide a tighter fit.
- Use the safety glasses to seal the top of the face covering by pulling the covering higher and positioning/resting glasses over the top of the face covering.



- **Dish Soap Detergent/Shaving Cream Methods:**

- Wash glasses' lenses with soapy water, shake off the excess liquid, and then either air dry or gently wipe dry with a soft cloth before wearing glasses again.
- Use a single drop of dish soap detergent on both sides of glasses' lenses, rub it in with your fingers, rinse off, and then either air dry or gently wipe dry with a soft cloth before wearing them again.
- Apply shaving cream to both sides of glasses' lenses and then with a soft cloth wipe it off before wearing glasses again.
- Dish soaps or detergents marketed for "sensitive skin" often contain lotion(s), and are not recommended for this application.



- **Commercial Anti-Fogging Products:** Consider purchasing an anti-fog solution/wipe and spray/wipe the product on lenses prior to wearing glasses with a face covering.



- **Safety Goggles:** Consider wearing safety goggles. The adjustable elastic strap in safety goggles allows for a snug fit over and around the eyes and some offer ventilation and/or anti-fog coating to help maintain clarity of vision.



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