

## **UCLA Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) Guidance: Implementation of NIH Downgrade of SARS-CoV-2 from Risk Group 3 to Risk Group 2**

**Effective Date:** March 6, 2025

### **Purpose:**

This document outlines UCLA's guidance for researchers in response to the NIH Office of Science Policy's downgrade of SARS-CoV-2 from Risk Group 3 (RG3) to Risk Group 2 (RG2). It provides UCLA containment and biosafety practices for *in vitro* and *in vivo* research and ensures compliance with NIH guidelines while maintaining safety standards. While the Risk Group (RG) classification is based on the intrinsic risk of the agent, the Biosafety Level (BSL) determines the laboratory containment practices required for safe handling, and UCLA will establish the appropriate BSL for research involving SARS-CoV-2.

### **Scope:**

This policy applies to all UCLA researchers and personnel conducting *in vitro* and *in vivo* work involving SARS-CoV-2, including its variants and derivative materials, in facilities owned and operated by UCLA.

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### **Guidance Statement:**

Following the NIH downgrade of SARS-CoV-2 from RG3 to RG2, UCLA has evaluated the containment requirements for research involving the agent. The university will implement Biosafety Level 2 (BSL-2+) containment standards, with specific enhancements tailored for *in vitro* and *in vivo* work with SARS-CoV-2. Research risk assessments will be conducted by the IBC on a case-by-case basis to evaluate whether specific research projects warrant containment level adjustments, depending on the nature of the work and associated risks. Research with high-risk or emerging strains of SARS-CoV-2 may still be assessed by the IBC as requiring Biosafety Level 3 containment.

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### **Biosafety Practices:**

#### **1. *In vitro* experiments**

Specific BSL-2+ practices and containment measures are required when handling SARS-CoV-2 virus, including working with cultures or viral stocks.

The following enhanced practices must be implemented:

- a. Respiratory protections: N95 mask or other respirator
- b. Double gloving, with the outer pair of gloves disposed inside the biosafety cabinet
- c. Restriction of the lab space to personnel actively involved in the work while it is in progress
- d. Handling of all waste containers, sharps containers, and other contaminated material inside the biosafety cabinet (BSC).

## 2. *In vivo* Experiments

Animal BSL2 (ABSL2) containment is required for all animal studies involving SARS-CoV-2, with enhanced precautions to protect personnel and prevent environmental contamination outlined below. UCLA ABSL2 facilities for rodents are equipped with powered, HEPA-filtered micro-isolator cage racks. In addition, the following practices for animal work with SARS-CoV-2 will be required:

- a) **Respiratory Protection:** Staff must wear a fitted N95 mask at all times, even when working within a BSC during infection experiments.
- b) **Containment:** Staff must maintain ABSL2 containment for the entire duration of the research experiment.
- c) **Animal Infections:** Conduct all animal infections within a BSC, ensuring that no other work is performed in the room during these high-risk procedures.
- d) **Cage Changes:** DLAM staff will perform post-infection cage changes, wearing a surgical mask inside a BSC.
- e) **Cage Labeling:** The lab must ensure agent cage labels are placed on all cages to inform staff of the specific agents involved in *in vivo* work.

**Note:** *certain operational logistics will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and specified in individual BUAs if deviations from the requirements above occur.*

## 3. COVID Infected Samples:

UCLA policy on handling of patient or environmental SARS-CoV-2 samples remains unchanged. The university maintains the baseline requirement that processing of blood, tissue, sputum, air filters, wastewater, and similar materials be conducted at BSL-2. Specific controls are determined through risk assessment for each experiment. Laboratories already working with these samples do not need to modify their existing approvals or protocols.

### IBC Review and Approval Process:

Research laboratories must submit a **Biological Use Authorization (BUA)** application for new research or submit an amendment to an existing approved BUA to request a containment change for **SARS-CoV-2** research. The IBC will evaluate the proposed research using the above framework as guidance when performing the risk assessment. The IBC will make a final determination, approve the BUA, and notify the PI of the approval and any approval conditions required based on the research project.

**Note:** *All previously approved containment practices outlined in the lab's BUA will remain in effect until the IBC reviews and approves the downgrade request.*

### Incident Reporting and Emergency Procedures

All incidents involving potential exposure to SARS-CoV-2 must be reported immediately to the UCLA [Biosafety Office](#). Researchers should follow established protocols for post-exposure evaluation and response.

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### Resources:

- [NIH Biosafety Considerations for Research Involving SARS-CoV-2](#)
  - [UCLA Biosafety Office](#)
  - [UCLA IBC](#)
  - [NIH Guidelines](#)
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**Contact Information:** For questions or additional information, please contact the UCLA IBC at [IBC@research.ucla.edu](mailto:IBC@research.ucla.edu) or the Biosafety Office at [biosafety@ehs.ucla.edu](mailto:biosafety@ehs.ucla.edu).