POST-LOCKDOWN BIOSAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR A SAFE ENVIRONMENT IN ADMINISTRATIVE AND MANAGERIAL OFFICES

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Foreword

The Pakistan Biological Safety Association (PBSA), in collaboration with Khyber Medical University (KMU), has prepared "**Post-Lockdown Biosafety Recommendations and Guidelines for a Safe Environment in Administrative and Managerial offices**" to ensure safe resumption of activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. We believe there is a need to have concise and clearly defined SOPs not only to ensure hazard reduction and risk control, but also to endorse the responsibility entrusted by the Government of Pakistan during COVID-19. This document covers safe entry and exit protocols, workplace safety ethics and guidelines for institutional management to provide a safe environment in the workplace premises. We have prepared these guidelines so that various institutions and offices, can use theme as a draft to formulate their own institution-specific customized protocols. These guidelines are not specific to health care facilities or laboratories which deal directly with patient care or sample processing.

We are thankful to Dr. Hafsah Muhammad (Assistant Professor, KMU) who was the focal person in the development of these guidelines, along with Dr. Saima Saleem (Associate Professor, KIBGE), Syeda Shazia Adeel (Senior Scientific Officer, NIH), Zia Ashraf (Lecturer, Government College University, Faisalabad) and Aneeta Hotwani (Lab Manager, AKU), all of whom contributed to the development of these guidelines. We are also thankful to Dr. Aamer Ikram (President PBSA/Executive Director, NIH-Islamabad), Dr. Zeba Rasmussen (Senior Research Fellow, NIH-USA), Chelsea Hansen (Contractor, NIH-USA), Dr. Philippe Stroot (CEO, XiBios, Belgium) Dr. Mashaal Chaudhri (Programme Manager, PBSA), Fariha Munir (Project Officer, PBSA), and Shehroze Ameen (Grant Development Officer, PBSA) for their constant support and for arranging the liaison between all members of the SOP development team.

We thank YOU, fellow reader, for your commitment and for striving to make Pakistan Biosafe and Biosecure.

POST-LOCKDOWN BIOSAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR A SAFE ENVIRONMENT IN ADMINISTRATIVE AND MANAGERIAL OFFICES

Guidelines for Entry and Exit

- Wearing face mask, covering both nose and mouth, is required for entry

- Greet with words, avoid handshaking

- Frequent handwashing with soap and water is strongly encouraged. Touch your eyes, nose, and mouth only with clean hands, not with dirty unclean hands.

- Follow physical distancing (6 feet or 2 meters apart) and keep gatherings to three people or fewer.

- Cough or sneeze in the elbow to avoid aerosol spread, or carry paper tissues to cover mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing. Dispose of paper tissues in a trash can immediately after use and wash hands; sanitizing hands may be done if handwashing not possible.

- It is recommended that people above 50 years of age avoid public spaces and work from home if possible. Please provide flexibility for this age group.

- Inform healthcare providers and the first aid counter of your institution if you have respiratory symptoms (e.g. cough, fever, shortness of breath) or if you have any person at home having COVID-19 symptoms.

- Make travel arrangements to minimize contact with other individuals.

- Wear a facemask during transport and while at triage at any healthcare facility.

- Practice social distancing outside the institution premises as well.

Guidelines for Workplace

- Maintain a distance of at least 6 feet or 2 meters between yourself and colleagues.

- Prefer using your own phones, desks, computers, or offices. Usage of common/shared items results in enhancing proximity of users, thereby increasing the risk of infection.

- Disinfect shared tools and equipment before and after each use with appropriate disinfectant. Examples includeusing a diluted bleach solution (0.1-0.5%) OR alcohol solution with at least 70% alcohol. A complete list of disinfectants recommended by the government of Pakistan can be found at http://mofa.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Advisory-Disinfectants.pdf.pdf

- Frequently wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, OR use hand sanitizer that contains at least 70% alcohol. Use enough hand sanitizer (e.g. size of 50 paisa coin) so that it remains wet while you perform the steps of handwashing.
- Practice sneezing etiquette: sneeze or cough into your bent elbow or tissue paper.
- Discard your used masks and gloves into the designated bins instead of placing on furniture.
- It is very important to maintain social distancing while taking meals (lunch/tea breaks). Eating together in closed spaces increases the chances of catching SARS-CoV-2 infection.

Guidelines under Special Conditions

- Work outside in a well-ventilated place (if possible).
- Avoid face to face contact while in a compact place (lift or crowded corridor)
- Install physical barriers such as transparent plastic curtains between employees when feasible.
- Communication through phones or email is preferred over in-person visits. Maintain social distancing (6 feet or 2 meters apart)
- Limit gatherings to three people in offices or corridors inside building areas

Guidelines for Reporting Incidents

- Report any incident to the supervisor immediately when:
  o Any employee has any symptoms suggesting COVID-19
  o You observe a breach of your Institute's COVID-19 prevention SOPs
  o Social distancing is not maintained
  o Any other adverse or alarming condition or event occurs

  NOTE: When performing work activities, employees must stop work if unexpected or unplanned conditions arise that jeopardize compliance with social distancing requirements

Guidelines for Institutions

- Provide a small supply of surgical masks at entry gates for people coming without masks.
- Check temperatures and provide hand sanitizer at all entry gates and at multiple places within the facility.
- Prefer online meetings over the in-person meetings whenever possible.
- Create a first aid counter with a health care provider in the institution

- Designate a staff person or create a COVID Assistance Committee to be responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns.

- Prepare an information pamphlet for persons who are exposed after joining the institution and specify the steps they must follow for testing and reporting to their respective departments.

- Head of Departments and supervisors are responsible for educating their staff/teams on the prevention, management, signs and symptoms of COVID-19.

- Provide training with frequent refresher training for housekeeping and support staff.

- Display one-page instructions for handwashing and other awareness messages at all entry gates and frequently visited places.

- Define specific areas for disposal of infectious waste (like used masks or tissue papers) with trash bins/bags labelled and color coded (color code as per your institute's policy). Note where waste bags will go for proper waste disposal.

- If the office space is too small, consider staggering work in shifts. Duties can be divided and rotation of duties can take place to maintain the distance and avoid exposure from others.

- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces (e.g., door handles, sink handles, drinking fountains) within the premises at least daily or between uses as much as possible.

- Limit visitors and guests in waiting areas while observing safety protocols.

- Administration shall provide work from home flexibility for non-essential staff and high-risk individuals (those over 50 or those with underlying medical conditions) while still respecting privacy.

- Staff testing positive for COVID-19 shall return home immediately and quarantine for 14 days. Staff may resume duty after testing negative and completing the proper quarantine period.

- Consider contactless attendance methods for employees and staff members (for example, use attendance register operated by one person who notes down attendance of all employees, or any personal mobile phone-based method of registering attendance to report to officials). Use of biometric attendance devices including thumb/ finger/ palm impression increase the chances of catching infection.

- Future Safety Approach: New admissions / job application to be received online or by post. Avoid physical exposure with applicants.