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Subject: EAPS Community update, COVID-19 (21 Mach 2020)
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Campus police: 617-253-1212

MIT Medical's COVID-19 hotline at 617-253-4865

EAPS/MIT message archive: <https://eapsweb.mit.edu/news/2020/covid-19-eaps-updates>

Saturday 3/21/2020

To all members of the EAPS Community:

You are always on my mind, so I will start the weekend connecting with all of you, the EAPS community – dispersed, but (virtually) together as never before. It is hard to grasp what has happened since my first message to you on this topic, on 3/10, which feels like eons ago. We have had little time to reflect let alone fully comprehend the impact of past events on our lives and our work at the Institute. We have all done so much, but anxiety, uncertainty, and a sense of urgency (and, perhaps, dread) for further action are palpable. This is, therefore, not the time to pause. But I do want to take a moment to express how impressed I have been with how everybody has been stepping up to the plate to help each other, to adjust, and to do what needs to be done to keep the department whole and transition it to new grounds. I am grateful to all, but please allow me – and join me – to express my particular gratitude and immense respect for our HQ and support staff, who have all done an amazing job responding to daily challenges and policy changes.

With my messages I try to find a balance between being informative and brief. Topical news, e.g., from HQ or the Education Office, keeps you up to date on specific developments and directives, and MIT sends out announcements at even higher frequency. To avoid sensory overload and online fatigue, I will not repeat that content here but refer to our home page where [messages to our community](#) are being archived for easy view and where you can find links to the most relevant MIT sites ([COVID-19](#), [Medical COVID-19](#)).

Let me reiterate that the safety and health of you and the communities in which you live is the number one priority for what we do as individuals and as a department and institute. Every day, this requires facing complicated situations and making difficult decisions with the (limited) information at hand at the time. Some of these are communicated and executed better than others, and I fully understand that some measures (and timelines) are unsettling and cause frustration, anxiety, and perhaps anger. But please know that we are all trying hard to do the right things for the community in very difficult times. We don't know how long this will take, and it would be wise to be mentally and logistically prepared for short-notice announcements of more restrictive measures. For example, the City of Cambridge does not currently have plans for

more restrictive measures. For example, the City of Cambridge does not currently have plans for 'Shelter-in-Place' but such measures cannot be ruled out and may, indeed, be needed.

In the meantime, I urge everybody (wherever you are) to help by following the general guidance aimed at 'flattening the curve' and preventing system overloads. Each of you can help in multiple ways to protect yourself and others (See also [CDC advice](#) and [MIT Medical News](#)):

- Practice common sense hygiene: wash hands regularly, avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth, clean door knobs and hard surfaces, cover mouth when coughing etc.
- Practice social distancing: keep distance (6ft is advised), avoid public transportation, and other places with high density of people; try e-drinks with friends 😊 Not to cause panic, but perhaps a practical mindset would be to act as if you have been exposed and want to protect others.
- Stay fit and healthy: exercise, sleep well, and be rested.
- As the likelihood of having positive cases on campus (or in your direct environments) increases please read carefully the [Guidance for when you become aware of a person with \(possible\) exposure to COVID-19](#).

Social distancing and reduced movement and interaction between people has shown to be effective in slowing the spread of COVID-19, and this is one of the guiding principles for MIT actions. [This video](#) explains why we are doing what we are doing, in a clear, compelling, and compassionate way.

OK, back to what's happening ...

Residential housing: The past two weeks have been rather challenging. The first focused on preparing for online teaching, de-densifying campus, and moving our undergraduate students to safer places. Last weekend we began making plans to scale back our on-campus research, and just when we were about to put them to work and transition into what looked to be a relatively calm weekend we received a message about [graduate housing changes](#). This announcement was unsettling, in part because it came so late in the day with action requested for the weekend. Fortunately, the number of EAPS graduate students in campus residences is small, and over the past week Megan Jordan has done a marvelous job keeping in touch with all of them. Please know how much we care about all of you, and please rest assured that every day – weekends included – we are trying to monitor, keep in touch, and do the best we can for each of you. We are in this together—indeed, please consider that we all have to adjust to the new situation, staff included—and as much as we can we are here for you. So please let us know how we are doing and how we can help.

Scaling back on-campus research: The fact that, for now, almost every next decision is likely to call for more restrictive measures also guided our planning for the wind down of (non-residential) on-campus research activities. Much of what we do (such as, reading and writing papers, proposals, preparing for exams, processing data, thinking, discussing research with individuals and groups) can be done remotely, so the on-campus research scale back was mostly focused on laboratory work. It was painful to halt our cutting-edge research and prepare labs for stand-by mode, but this is a time to think about everyone's safety and public health even if it is not to our personal liking. With more restrictive measures likely to be announced sooner rather than later it seemed more sensible to prepare for an orderly cessation of experiments and lab shutdown now than wait for requests to do so at very short notice. Moreover, continued use of labs would have required others to be there (lab techs, students, postdocs, researchers, security, custodians ...). I understand how frustrating this was for anybody relying on output from experiments for papers,

exams, and grant deliverables, and I thank everybody for their help with these difficult decisions.

Working remotely when possible: In this context I remind everybody that as much as we can, we should work from home, and that we cannot require anybody (incl. students, postdocs, staff, faculty) to come to campus. This also applies to the emergency stand-by mode of critical instruments, equipment, and long-lasting experiments, even if that means that labs have to shut down even more completely. Safety and personal and public health have the highest priority. If anybody has a concern about this campus-wide policy, feel free to contact me or use the [hotline](#) for guidance and advice.

Putting your labs and supplies to good use: Since our labs are in stand-by mode, with many activities halted altogether, please consider putting your supplies (and perhaps even your spaces) to good use and [donate your PPEs](#) (Personal Protective Equipment) to hospitals and regional centers.

Exams and academic policy: Every spring, academic progress is high on our students' minds, and in the current situation it causes more stress and anxiety than in normal years. I won't repeat yesterday's message on [EAPS education policies and procedures during COVID-19 restrictions](#) (thanks Taylor!), but just urge everybody to stay in close touch with your students, especially those facing deadlines, and provide the best possible academic experiences that the current situation allows.

Some other developments that have implications for us:

First, **construction moratorium:** As of today, the City of Cambridge has halted all construction work. That means that current work on Building 54 deferred maintenance and Building 4 lab construction has stopped. Design, as for our Pavilion, will continue, but permits cannot be pulled, and construction not started until further notice.

Second, **towards a smaller campus:** The minimal on-campus research and teaching activities give MIT the opportunity to allow as many service providers as possible to stay home. Therefore, MIT is moving most buildings to "limited access", including Buildings 54 and E25. Access will be by card and MIT ID only: until 3/24 we continue to operate in "weekend mode", from 3/25 onward only those with explicit permission will have access. These categories include people involved in critical lab activities (and who are willing to come to campus – see above), instructors who need access to facilities for teaching purposes (make sure Megan and Michael have your names), essential personnel (police, custodians, ...), and vendors (including gas delivery). We will provide further details on Monday, but for now, please retrieve from your offices all the materials that you think you might need, for instance for study, course preparation, and online teaching.

Finally, **MIT campus police** has already stepped up their presence but advises to: (1) lock offices and other rooms (and don't use props to keep doors open!) and (2) safely store or take home valuables such as lap-tops. They will patrol more on campus and be more pro-active than before –so please be prepared to show your MIT ID. In case you need access or to report a crime, accident, or incident: please call 617-253-1212 or (from campus) 31212.

I think that's it for now. Stay safe, enjoy the weekend, and look after each other. I am proud of EAPS and the strong sense of community will help get us through this crisis.

Best to all, and don't hesitate to contact us with concerns, questions, or any other comment.

Rob van der Hilst
Head, EAPS

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