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Subject: MIT's Response to the Challenge of COVID-19
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To: cookj@mit.edu



L. Rafael Reif, President

To the members of the MIT community,

Since early January, we have been tracking the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) situation daily, offering [standing guidance](#) and regular updates. We will continue that practice.

However, with the disease now established in the US, and with spring break and major holidays coming up shortly, **we are intensifying our institutional response.**

I write now to share important new MIT policies and guidelines about travel and events.

Because they will affect all of us on campus in some way, I ask that everyone – students, staff, postdocs, affiliates and faculty – take the time to read the new [policies, which appear here](#) and below.

For our campus community, the current risk level associated with COVID-19 is low.

However, global hotspots shift, and the contagion pattern is not well understood. With that uncertainty, we need to make prudent choices to protect the health of our own community and the broader communities we belong to, without creating unnecessary disruptions to the normal pursuit of our educational and research mission.

This balanced approach led us to the travel, visitor and event policies below. In shaping them, we consulted experts at MIT Medical and carefully considered the decisions of peer universities and major businesses around the world that are also striving to respond to this fluid situation.

These guidelines represent our best judgment, at this moment, about practical steps we can all take to reduce risk for ourselves and for each other. Because MIT is a community constantly on the move and always inviting people in, I know that asking you to abide by

the restrictions in these new policies is non-trivial. Where we can safely consider exceptions, we have provided a process for doing so. Beyond that, I ask for everyone's cooperation as we try to choose a sound path for us all.

Since future challenges from COVID-19 could disrupt critical Institute functions, we are developing contingency plans. For example, in case we face an urgent need to switch to online instruction, we are actively developing options; the vice chancellor will follow up with faculty and instructors to better understand their needs and guide them to initial resources.

I encourage each of you to think through how you can help limit risk as well, starting with shifting to virtual meetings when you can. Supervisors may wish to consider now how telecommuting might work in their unit, if public health concerns grow worse.

I know that both the spread of this disease and our decisions about it affect not only MIT programs and planning, but the lives of individuals. For many of you, the steps we are taking to protect the health of the community may involve significant inconvenience and personal sacrifice. Please accept my gratitude in advance for your goodwill and understanding.

I also hope we can be sensitive to each other's burdens in this situation and make accommodations when we can. And I count on every member of our community to make sure that the discrimination, shunning and bullying that sometimes accompany an outbreak never occur at MIT.

In this uncertain moment, I have every confidence in our community's ability to pull together with kindness, care and concern for the common good.

Sincerely,

L. Rafael Reif

NEW POLICIES AND GUIDELINES ON TRAVEL, VISITORS AND EVENTS: MARCH 5–MAY 15, 2020

The policies below will take effect immediately and stay in place through at least May 15. In this two-month period, we will review them on a rolling basis, provide frequent updates and offer new guidance about activities after May 15 as soon as we can.

If you have questions about how these policies apply in your own situation, our Emergency

Management staff can help triage your requests. Please contact em-staff@mit.edu.

We recognize that responding to the new requirements may have financial implications for units across campus. If the costs feel significant for your unit, please bring these concerns to your unit head. The information we gather from these conversations will help us understand the impact across campus and assess how we can help.

MIT Guidance for Travel, Visitors and Events

TRAVEL ABROAD

Effective immediately – and in step with [new advice from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health](#) – we are *suspending all international travel on MIT business or with MIT programs, for all faculty, students, postdocs and staff. This includes any travel associated with one’s scholarly activities as an MIT employee, even travel funded by a government grant, foundation, company or other university.*

Rare exceptions will be considered; those who feel they have a compelling need to travel internationally may apply in writing to the provost and the chancellor at COVIDtravel@mit.edu. Anyone currently abroad may return to MIT or in some cases to their home.

We also *discourage personal travel to international locations* by any MIT community member. If you must travel to any country on the CDC’s [COVID-19 travel advisories](#) page, please know that you are required to [fill out this form](#) two or three days before you return. Those returning from Level 3 countries will be required to self-quarantine for 14 days upon return; others may also be required to self-quarantine.

We know many students plan travel for spring break. We urge you to weigh the risks and potential consequences for yourself and others. If you travel to any nation where the [CDC reports](#) “widespread sustained (ongoing) transmission” of COVID-19, you will not be permitted to complete your required two-week self-quarantine on campus. Further, as new outbreaks occur and government travel restrictions shift, be aware that, if you choose to travel outside the United States, you may encounter difficulties in returning.

TRAVEL IN THE US

We will continue to fund MIT-related domestic travel as usual. However, we encourage everyone in our community – faculty, staff, postdocs and students – to **weigh whether any domestic travel between now and May 15 is essential** and to explore options to join

meetings or events remotely, especially in the growing number of areas with high infection rates.

TRACKING TRAVEL FOR PUBLIC HEALTH PURPOSES

Until May 15, we strongly encourage everyone in the MIT community to register ALL non-commuting travel outside of Massachusetts in the confidential [MIT travel registry](#). This applies to both personal and MIT-related trips, international and domestic. If a new COVID-19 outbreak occurs in a place where our community members have been traveling, having this confidential information will help our public health team take effective action.

VISITORS FROM OUTSIDE MIT

Visitors from countries which the CDC finds [have “widespread sustained \(ongoing\) transmission” of COVID-19](#) cannot join us on campus until they have successfully completed 14 days of self-quarantine.

Other visitors are welcome at MIT. However, common sense dictates that the next two months are not the best time to host large groups.

To protect children and older visitors to campus, we ask that you:

- **Cancel or reschedule all K–12 programs and visits to be held at MIT from now through May 15.**
- Consider postponing a meeting if your visitors are over the age of 60.

MIT EVENTS

Effective immediately, if you are planning any in-person MIT event with more than 150 attendees that will take place between now and Friday, May 15, on campus or off campus, you must postpone, cancel or “virtualize” it.

This new policy does not apply to classroom instruction or other internal gatherings (e.g., colloquia) attended solely by members of the MIT on-campus community.

Unfortunately, it does apply to Campus Preview Weekend and other signature spring semester conferences and celebrations. As an example, we have now postponed the MIT Excellence Awards until June.

Exceptions are possible for imminent events with travelers already here or en route; please inform us immediately at COVIDevents@mit.edu if you are hosting such a gathering. In

very limited cases, we may consider appeals to hold larger gatherings attended only by members of our community. You may submit an inquiry at COVIDevents@mit.edu.

We chose 150 people as a threshold to help reduce risk of transmission without calling a halt to all activity on campus. However, group size is only one factor to consider in planning an event – and our success in managing the risk of COVID-19 depends not only on the existence of these policies, but on your cooperation and common sense.

As you plan events with fewer than 150 attendees, please consider these factors:

- 1. How many people will attend, and will they be in close quarters?** In some cases, it may make sense to go ahead with an event but to reduce the attendance well below 150. Even with fewer people, if your event is planned for a confined space, you may want to choose a larger site, allow people to participate remotely or both.
- 2. How many participants will be coming from abroad, or from US locations with high infection rates?** Given the changeability of travel restrictions, international visitors may face difficulties coming from or returning to their home countries.
- 3. What do you know about the age and health of expected attendees?** Evidence to date suggests that COVID-19 hits certain vulnerable populations harder, including older individuals. Whatever the size of your event, consider postponing it if many attendees will be over the age of 60.
- 4. What is the risk to staff who will help prepare for your event, serve your guests and clean up afterward?** Staff working for outside service vendors may not have generous health insurance or sick leave, and we should take steps to help keep them safe.

For all events of every size:

- Encourage handwashing!
- Make it easy for your guests to practice good health hygiene: provide hand sanitizer and tissues, and minimize communal food.
- Educate your attendees about proper precautions.
- Urge anyone who feels unwell to stay home and to participate online if possible.
- You may also want to arrange for enhanced cleaning of the event site, before and after.

MIT CLASSES AND INSTRUCTIONAL MEETINGS

All meetings and classes attended by members of the on-campus community can continue to be held as normal.

However, please stay home if you feel sick, and urge others to do so. Encourage handwashing, provide hand sanitizer and tissues, minimize communal food, and educate your students and colleagues about proper precautions.

For large classes, consider offering a way to attend online or arranging other accommodations.

You can find the latest advice any time at medical.mit.edu/covid-19. For support or questions, please email covid19-support@mit.edu.

These policies and guidelines reflect MIT's official position as of March 5, 2020. In this fluid situation, they may need to change in the future with little warning.

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