October 19, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

During the month of October, we turn our attention to heightening awareness on Biosafety and Biosecurity. It is difficult not to think about biosafety and biosecurity in today’s COVID-ridden world, and as the pandemic surges once again biosafety remains at the forefront of our mind.

Many of the practices that we have put in place to deal with the pandemic and prevent its spread across universities, companies, and small businesses are built upon best practices that we, in the biological research community, have used for many years: use PPE to protect yourself, wash your hands often, and disinfect your spaces to avoid contamination. And the bioscience research that we have done at the University of Maryland and at many other universities across the world is helping to inform the use and benefits of face coverings, social distancing, and other protective measures to further prevent its spread. It is important to note that while we do this critical research in our biological laboratories, the incidence of community transmission in research spaces remains low across the country because of our attention and vigilance to the use of safe laboratory practices. The biosafety professionals in every organization have been at the center of the conversation, and have worked endless hours to advise our communities about risks and safety practices.

But our attention span in the 21st century tends to be low and there will be a need in the not-to-distant future to remind the public and our own communities that we need to continue to be vigilant about issues of biosafety and biosecurity. People say this is a once-in-a-hundred-year event, but we have been edging toward this for many years now with previous outbreaks of disease on multiple continents that have been contained. The conversation moving forward will be centered around prevention and preparedness – which again, is not unfamiliar to our biosafety professionals and to anyone performing excellent biological research.

We have learned many valuable lessons during this pandemic, but among the most valuable are to trust and respect science, trust and respect our biosafety professionals, and learn to adapt, evolve, and change- just like the biological organisms that we study.

I want to end by giving my sincere thanks to all of our biosafety and biosecurity professionals for the hours and hours they have dedicated to making us all safer in an uncertain time.

Sincerely,

Laurie E. Locascio, PhD
Vice President for Research