# Visitors in Research Laboratories and Research Support Areas with Controlled Access

**Policy #S-005**

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System
Pittsburgh, PA 15240

**Signatory Authority:**Dr. Steven Graham, ACOS

**Responsible Owner:**Associate Chief of Staff/R&D

**Service Line(s):**Research and Development (R&D) Department

**Effective Date:**March 17, 2020

**Recertification Date:**December 2021

## PURPOSE AND AUTHORITY

* 1. The purpose of this document is to define a policy for visitors that enter VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS) research laboratory settings or research support areas. The term “research laboratory” in this policy includes the wet laboratories that require employees/staff to use an ID-card or a key to gain access. The term “research support area” in this policy indicates common use spaces such as the room that contains the ice machine and the sterilizer or the room that contains the water filtration system.
	2. This SOP sets forth mandatory procedures and processes to ensure compliance with VHA Directive 1200.08, Safety of Personnel and Security of Laboratories Involved in VA Research, April 24, 2019.

## PROCEDURES

* 1. **Introduction.**

Laboratory research often involves potentially hazardous and regulated materials, such as biological and chemical agents, toxins, and radioisotopes, as well as potentially hazardous equipment. For this reason, regular access to VAPHS research laboratories and research support areas is restricted to authorized laboratory personnel whose presence is part of their normal work, supervised research or coursework, or is a consequence of normal interaction and collaboration.

Employees, students, and individuals from other academic or research institutions, business organizations, other governmental agencies, and vendors may visit VAPHS research laboratories and research support areas on a short term, infrequent basis provided that there is a business or educational purpose for the visit. Principal Investigators (PI’s) and laboratory directors are responsible for making appropriate arrangements for such visits based on considerations of safety and non-disruption of research activities; these individuals may deny access to non-authorized personnel.

* 1. **Policy.**
		1. An Authorized Guide must notify the Associate Chief of Staff for Research (ACOS/R&D) and the Deputy ACOS/R&D that they will be bringing a visitor into research laboratory space. The Authorized Guide must provide the ACOS/R&D and Deputy ACOS/R&D with the visitor’s name, the reason for the visit, the rooms to be visited, and the estimated length of the visit by email or in writing **at least 24 hours** in advance of the visit. The ACOS/R&D or the Deputy ACOS/R&D will inform the Authorized Guide if the visitor is approved to enter the Research area.
		2. Visitors entering VAPHS research laboratories or research support areas must always be under the direct supervision of the Authorized Guide. Prior to entry, the visitor must be informed of the potential hazards to which they may be exposed while in the laboratory, as well as any appropriate precautions the visitor must take to protect themselves. A briefing should be provided regarding activities that are currently underway in the laboratory, what to do in case of an emergency, and exit routes. Under some circumstances, visitors may be asked to wear personal protective equipment appropriate for the hazards present in the laboratory or research support area. Additional access restrictions may apply to some laboratories that contain the following: animals, biohazardous agents, laser equipment, or non-ionizing radiation sources, radioactive materials or radiation-producing machines and human subject research.
		3. Visitors must immediately report to the VA Police Service upon entry onto the VAPHS University Drive campus. Visitors will be issued a visitor badge when they sign into the facility.
		4. Visitors not in compliance with the requirements outlined in this policy will be prohibited from entering VAPHS research laboratories or research support areas. If a visitor fails to adhere to these requirements once inside VAPHS research laboratories or research support areas, they will be removed from the space immediately.
		5. Visitors shall not be permitted to take still photographs or videos unless prior approval has been granted by the ACOS/R&D and the PI that occupies the space. This includes the use of cell phones for these purposes.
		6. Minors are NOT permitted in VAPHS research laboratories or research support areas.
		7. Pets are NOT permitted in VAPHS research laboratories or research support areas.

## ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

* 1. PI’s and laboratory managers are responsible for implementing and enforcing this policy.
	2. The ACOS/R&D and/or Deputy ACOS/R&D must review requests for an Authorized Guide to bring visitors into research laboratory space.
	3. The Authorized Guide are responsible to supervise visitors that enter into research laboratory space.

## DEFINITIONS

* 1. **Visitor** – A visitor is any person who enters a research laboratory, research support area, or other potentially hazardous space upon the express or implied invitation of the laboratory’s PI, lab manager or his/her staff. The VAPHS has an obligation to ensure all visitors are escorted throughout the VAPHS Medical Center.
	2. **Visitors do NOT include:**
1. Employees, fellows and students of the VAPHS Medical Center authorized to participate in one or more approved Research and Development (R&D) protocols.
2. A consultant or other non-VAPHS faculty, staff or student registered as an authorized agent or guest and approved for work on a specific IACUC or IBC approved protocol.
3. An outside vendor or a VAPHS employee not otherwise approved on a specific IBC or IACUC-approved protocol but authorized by the facility for the purpose of facility maintenance, certification, or inspection.
	1. **Authorized Guide** is the person that invites the visitor. This person plans for visitors to enter research laboratories or research support areas. The Authorized Guide must be a VA Research employee who is authorized to access the laboratory space(s) where the visitor will enter.

## REFERENCES

VHA Directive 1200.08, Safety of Personnel and Security of Laboratories Involved in VA Research, April 24, 2019, <https://www.research.va.gov/resources/policies/handbooks.cfm>

## REVIEW

This policy is reviewed at recertification, when there are changes to the governing document (for example, national policy or an accreditation body mandate), and any regulatory requirement for more frequent review.

## RECERTIFICATION

This Policy is scheduled for recertification fifteen (15) months from the Effective Date. In the event of contradiction with national policy, the national policy supersedes and controls.

## SIGNATORY AUTHORITY

*//signed copy on file //*

Gretchen Haas, MD

Chair, Research and Development Committee

Date Approved: March 17, 2020

*//signed copy on file //*

Steven Graham, MD, PhD

Associate Chief of Staff Research and Development Department

Date Approved: March 17, 2020

***NOTE:*** *The signature remains valid until rescinded by an appropriate administrative action.*

**DISTRIBUTION:** Policy is available at: <https://www.va.gov/pittsburgh-health-care/research/safety-security/>