

Laboratory biosafety manual

Third edition



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9. Laboratory biosecurity concepts

The *Laboratory biosafety manual* has in the past focused on traditional biosafety guidance for laboratories. The manual emphasizes the use of good microbiological work practices, appropriate containment equipment, proper facility design, operation and maintenance, and administrative considerations to minimize the risk of worker injury or illness. In following these recommendations, the risk to the environment and surrounding community-at-large is also minimized. It has now become necessary to expand this traditional approach to biosafety through the introduction of laboratory biosecurity measures. Global events in the recent past have highlighted the need to protect laboratories and the materials they contain from being intentionally compromised in ways that may harm people, livestock, agriculture or the environment. Before the laboratory biosecurity needs of a facility can be defined, however, it is important to understand the distinction between “laboratory biosafety” and “laboratory biosecurity”.

“Laboratory biosafety” is the term used to describe the containment principles, technologies and practices that are implemented to prevent unintentional exposure to pathogens and toxins, or their accidental release. “Laboratory biosecurity” refers to institutional and personal security measures designed to prevent the loss, theft, misuse, diversion or intentional release of pathogens and toxins.

Effective biosafety practices are the very foundation of laboratory biosecurity activities. Through risk assessments, performed as an integral part of an institution’s biosafety programme, information is gathered regarding the type of organisms available, their physical location, the personnel who require access to them, and the identification of those responsible for them. This information can be used to assess whether an institution possesses biological materials that are attractive to those who may wish to use them improperly. National standards should be developed that recognize and address the ongoing responsibility of countries and institutions to protect specimens, pathogens and toxins from misuse.

A specific laboratory biosecurity programme must be prepared and implemented for each facility according to the requirements of the facility, the type of laboratory work conducted, and the local conditions. Consequently, laboratory biosecurity activities should be representative of the institution’s various needs and should include input from scientific directors, principal investigators, biosafety officers, laboratory

scientific staff, maintenance staff, administrators, information technology staff, and law enforcement agencies and security staff if appropriate.

Laboratory biosecurity measures should be based on a comprehensive programme of accountability for pathogens and toxins that includes an updated inventory with storage location, identification of personnel with access, description of use, documentation of internal and external transfers within and between facilities, and any inactivation and/or disposal of the materials. Likewise, an institutional laboratory biosecurity protocol should be established for identifying, reporting, investigating and remediating breaches in laboratory biosecurity, including discrepancies in inventory results. The involvement and roles and responsibilities of public health and security authorities in the event of a security infraction must be clearly defined.

Laboratory biosecurity training, distinct from laboratory biosafety training, should be provided to all personnel. Such training should help personnel understand the need for protection of such materials and the rationale for the specific biosecurity measures, and should include a review of relevant national standards and institution-specific procedures. Procedures describing the security roles and responsibilities of personnel in the event of a security infraction should also be presented during training.

The professional and ethical suitability for working with dangerous pathogens of all personnel who have regular authorized access to sensitive materials is also central to effective laboratory biosecurity activities.

In summary, security precautions should become a routine part of laboratory work, just as have aseptic techniques and other safe microbiological practices. Laboratory biosecurity measures should not hinder the efficient sharing of reference materials, clinical and epidemiological specimens and related information necessary for clinical or public health investigations. Competent security management should not unduly interfere with the day-to-day activities of scientific personnel or be an impediment to conducting research. Legitimate access to important research and clinical materials must be preserved. Assessment of the suitability of personnel, security-specific training and rigorous adherence to pathogen protection procedures are reasonable means of enhancing laboratory biosecurity. All such efforts must be established and maintained through regular risk and threat assessments, and regular review and updating of procedures. Checks for compliance with these procedures, with clear instructions on roles, responsibilities and remedial actions, should be integral to laboratory biosecurity programmes and national standards for laboratory biosecurity.