

Tulane University launches institute to bolster pandemic readiness and response

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The Tulane University Biocontainment Institute will provide full-scale training and instruction for biosafety professionals seeking to develop specialized research programs for pathogens requiring high levels of biocontainment.

Tulane University announced its new Biocontainment Institute, building upon years of investment and experience in biosafety and high containment research, to serve as a national and international training hub for pandemic readiness and response.

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biocontainment, helping to develop and ready a workforce for the next public health emergency.

The institute, offered in partnership with the Tulane National Primate Research Center (TNPRC), will mark the primate center's first offering of classroom-based education and training, with virtual course offerings the first year and classroom-hybrid offerings in subsequent years.

Research on emerging infectious diseases and pathogens of greatest concern to public health is strictly regulated and requires specialized facilities that can support it. The TNPRC houses one of the nation's 12 regional biocontainment laboratories — highly specialized facilities built specifically for research on biodefense and emerging infectious diseases and funded by the National Institutes of Health. This facility and the biosafety expertise of those who maintain it provide the foundation for research into these pathogens.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Office of Biosafety supported the needs of Tulane researchers doing some of the earliest and most foundational work on SARS-CoV2 at the primate center, School of Medicine, and School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. Led by Angie Birnbaum, executive director of biosafety, biocontainment operations, and quality assurance for Tulane University, the office set safety standards and protocols for working with the new virus in biocontainment that were adopted by other institutions. Birnbaum's core team of biosafety professionals also created quality assurance standards for rigor and reproducibility to ensure that studies run in other labs would achieve the same results.

The office also supports a [data coordinating center](#) at the Tulane National Primate Research Center that provides a mechanism for sharing data and results among partner institutions, reducing duplication of efforts and minimizing the number of laboratory animals required.

Building upon the Office of Biosafety's successes and track record of building exemplary biosafety, biosecurity, and quality assurance programs, the Biocontainment Institute will expand the capabilities of Tulane researchers to conduct cutting-edge pandemic response research while increasing the capacity for other agencies and institutions to develop their own.

"The Office of Biosafety provides the framework and support for the university's most critical and innovative research into emerging infectious diseases and does so at a scale that is almost unheard of at other places," said Dr. Giovanni Piedimonte, Tulane University's vice president for research. "Birnbaum's team has positioned Tulane as a worldwide leader in biocontainment operations, and this new institute provides us with the opportunity to serve as a training center for national and global pandemic readiness and response."



Angie Birnbaum leads the Office of Biosafety, which supports the needs of Tulane researchers at the Tulane National Primate Research Center, School of Medicine, and School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. (Sally Asher photo)