

University of Pittsburgh Safety Manual	EH&S Guideline Number: 03-023	
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GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF CONTACT LENSES IN A LABORATORY

This document provides guidelines for the use of contact lenses in a laboratory environment. Traditionally, contact lenses were prohibited from laboratory settings. The prohibition was based on concerns related to the absorption and adsorption of chemicals to the contact lens surface in the event of a chemical splash. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) reviewed this topic and came to the recommendation that laboratory workers be permitted to wear contact lenses in the laboratory because there was no evidence to support the previous concerns.

Contact lenses may be worn in the laboratory, provided appropriate eye protection is worn over the contact lenses and the laboratory does not utilize any of the chemicals specifically listed below.

1. Safety Precautions for the Use of Contact Lenses in Laboratories

- 1.1 Contact lenses are not eye protection devices. Wearing contact lenses does not reduce or alter the requirements for eye and face protection necessary for the assigned task.
- 1.2 Individuals who wear contact lenses in the laboratory must also wear suitable eye and face protection over the contact lenses (e.g. safety glasses, chemical splash goggles, and/or face shields).
- 1.3 In the event of a chemical or biological exposure to the eye or any type of eye irritation, do not delay eye washing due to lens removal. Rinse eyes with water for 15 minutes immediately upon chemical or biological splash to eyes. If contact lenses are worn, they should be removed during irrigation once rinsing has begun, without interrupting the flow of water.
- 1.4 Never handle contact lenses in the laboratory. Contact lenses should be inserted or removed in a clean environment outside the laboratory.

2. Specific Locations or Laboratories where Contact Lens Use is NOT Permitted

- 2.1 Contact lenses should not be worn in laboratories that actively use chemicals in the following classifications:
 - Volatile organic / Dienes (e.g., 1,3 Butadiene)
 - Organic nitriles (e.g., Acrylonitrile)
 - Inorganic nitrogen gases (e.g., Ammonia)
 - Epoxides (e.g., Ethylene Oxide)
 - Inorganic sulfides (e.g., Hydrogen Sulfide)
 - Benzidines / Aromatic amines (e.g., Methylenedianiline)
 - Halogenated aliphatic hydrocarbons (e.g., Methylene Chloride)
 - Metal halides (e.g., Titanium Tetrachloride)

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2.2 Contact lenses should not be worn in laboratories that actively work with free-living amoebae (e.g. *Acanthamoeba* spp.).

2.3 Wearing contact lenses may be prohibited in specific laboratories or locations (or during specific tasks) at the discretion of EH&S, the investigator, responsible faculty member or area supervisor. Additional restrictions on wearing contact lenses can be based on lab specific risk assessments conducted by the Principal Investigator.

References:

Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (June 2005). Current Intelligence Bulletin 59 – Contact Lens Use in a Chemical Environment. Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry (chemical classifications)

Biosafety in Microbiological and Biomedical Laboratories (BMBL), 6th edition