

Contact:
Kim Thurler
617-627-3175
kim.thurler@tufts.edu

Tufts University Unveils Plans for
New Medical Research Laboratory to Focus on Tuberculosis
*Renovation to Existing Building Will Enable Tufts
to Advance Infectious Disease Research*

BOSTON (May 16, 2012, 6 PM) -- Tufts University today announced that it will seek approval from the Boston Public Health Commission to build a 1,700 square foot biosafety level 3 research laboratory within its School of Medicine's existing Biomedical Research and Public Health Building at 136 Harrison Avenue. The Arnold 8 Biosafety Laboratory will enable Tufts researchers to find new ways to detect, prevent and treat serious infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, for which treatments exist but for which new therapeutics are needed.

Tuberculosis, the primary focus of the proposed laboratory, is a serious concern in Boston and worldwide. The rate of infection among Asians in the city is approximately 20 times higher than among Caucasians, according to the Boston Public Health Commission. The World Health Organization estimates that the disease infects as many as one in three people globally.

"Our Department of Molecular Biology and Microbiology has been at the forefront of infectious disease research for more than four decades. Our faculty discovered how penicillin kills bacteria and why HIV generates resistance to drugs so quickly, knowledge that is fundamental to HIV/AIDS treatment today," said Tufts University School of Medicine Dean Harris Berman, M.D. "The Arnold 8 Biosafety Laboratory will enable Tufts to remain on the forefront of life-saving medical research."

Until now, research at Tufts University School of Medicine (TUSM) has focused on areas that do not require a biosafety level 3 (BSL-3) laboratory. Today, however, there is a growing need for research on diseases and pathogens that must be studied in a BSL-3 laboratory, which is designed with specialized features that enable researchers to work with these organisms safely and effectively. Most other world-class microbiology departments have such laboratories. TUSM is the only medical school in Massachusetts not to have a BSL-3 laboratory.

The Boston Public Health Commission currently oversees permitting for 11 BSL-3 laboratories operating at major Boston hospitals and academic institutions.

"The Arnold 8 Biosafety Laboratory will help us recruit more leading researchers in infectious disease and enable current faculty to expand their research," said John Leong, M.D., Ph.D., chair of the Department of Molecular Biology and Microbiology at TUSM. "Locating the lab within an existing building close to our current research and teaching facilities will encourage collaboration and support the most effective research possible. I believe that with the addition of this laboratory, Tufts can continue to make great long-term contributions to the prevention of serious human infectious disease."

Tufts plans to begin the permitting process for the proposed laboratory with the Boston Public Health Commission within the month. Tufts will work closely with its Chinatown neighbors throughout project development. Neighbors are invited to attend an informational meeting on May 22 at 6:30 p.m. in room 114 at the Sackler Center for Medical Education, 145 Harrison Avenue.

Tufts will also form an advisory committee whose members will represent a cross-section of the community and will be requesting meetings with local community groups to share further information about the laboratory.

At 1,700 square feet the planned laboratory represents less than 1 percent of the total space of the existing 260,000 square foot Biomedical Research and Public Health Building in which it will be located. An estimated 25 to 30 people will be authorized to work in the lab, which will be able to accommodate half a dozen personnel at one time. Tufts hopes to start construction of the \$3.5 million facility later this year, with operation in 2013. The university will pay for the entire project. There will be no public funding.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health classify biosafety laboratories as level 1 through 4. As the biosafety level increases, more protective equipment is required for the researchers and increased safety features are incorporated into the laboratory. Tufts will not pursue a BSL-4 laboratory.

###

Tufts University, located on three Massachusetts campuses in Boston, Medford/Somerville, and Grafton, and in Talloires, France, is recognized among the premier research universities in the United States. Tufts enjoys a global reputation for academic excellence and for the preparation of students as leaders in a wide range of professions. A growing number of innovative teaching and research initiatives span all campuses, and collaboration among the faculty and students in the undergraduate, graduate and professional programs across the university is widely encouraged.

Tufts University School of Medicine and the Sackler School of Graduate Biomedical Sciences at Tufts University are international leaders in innovative medical education and advanced research. The School of Medicine and the Sackler School are renowned for excellence in education in general medicine, biomedical sciences, special combined degree programs in business, health management, public health, bioengineering and international relations, as well as basic and clinical research at the cellular and molecular level. Ranked among the top in the nation, the School of Medicine is affiliated with six major teaching hospitals and more than 30 health care facilities. Tufts University School of Medicine and the Sackler School undertake research that is consistently rated among the highest in the nation for its effect on the advancement of medical science.