

U Of L Awarded \$22 Million For Biosafety Lab

By Ed Green
Business First Staff Writer
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The University of Louisville has received its largest-ever grant from the National Institutes of Health to establish a regional biosafety laboratory that will be used to study and respond to outbreaks of infectious diseases.

The grant, which totals nearly \$22 million, will be used to build and furnish a \$34.6 million laboratory on U of L's Shelby Campus, near the intersection of Shelbyville Road and Hurstbourne Parkway. It will be called the Center for Predictive Medicine.

The funding, provided through the NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, is from \$125 million set aside in the 2005 budget to fund new Level 3 labs. U of L will provide the remaining funds needed to build the 45,000-square-foot facility by 2009, U of L President James Ramsey said during a news conference Wednesday.

U of L officials have been pursuing the grant to fund the laboratory for more than a year, Ramsey said, adding that the facility will have a significant economic impact on the Louisville area.

According to National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases' Web site, Level 3 labs are used to handle all but the most deadly contagious materials, which are handled instead by Level 4 labs.

Level 3, or BSL-3 labs, are used by researchers to study "agents that can

be transmitted through the air and cause potentially lethal infection." Among the organic agents that will be studied at the lab are influenza, tuberculosis, SARS and West Nile virus.

Currently, U of L researchers who are conducting research that requires use of a Level 3 lab use a smaller, one-room laboratory at the downtown health sciences campus. Otherwise, agents are sent to existing regional biosafety labs, and tests are conducted at those facilities.

U of L's BSL-3 lab is planned for 4.2 acres at the northeast corner of the Shelby Campus. The location was selected because the facility is consistent with the planned development of the Shelby Campus, and the land allows for the required 250-foot buffer zone, Ramsey said.

Dr. Larry Cook, executive vice president for U of L's Health Sciences Center, said the lab's primary mission will be to study and develop vaccines. The lab will house six primary researchers and up to a dozen graduate students.

The grant also could be called into service to conduct tests following a terrorist attack or natural disaster. Cook cited as an example the fact that all BSL-3 labs have been put on alert that they might be needed to help respond to outbreaks of disease stemming from flooding in New Orleans.

"We will have an educational mission as well as a research mission," Cook said. "But our principle mission will be to build research."

U of L officials are planning two public forums with residents near the Shelby Campus to share more information about the project. The meetings are scheduled for Sept. 8 and Sept. 12 and will be held from 7 to 9 p.m. in the Founders Union Building.

For more information, interested parties may visit:
www.louisville.edu/community/biosafetylab.

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