

Guidelines for UofM Research Under COVID-19

University of Memphis | May 2020

Disclaimer: This document provides only general guidelines for personnel (GAs, research staff, and faculty) and research facilities. It does not cover all possible variations of field/lab/shared facility research, nor does it cover all scenarios. Divisions, departments, and centers may add more stringent precautions to those advised here depending on circumstances. For more details and University of Memphis policies related to COVID-19, visit [memphis.edu/health/coronavirus](https://www.memphis.edu/health/coronavirus).

General Policy

- » The primary goal of this guidance is the **health and safety of our research staff**.
- » The primary defense against infectious viral spread is **personal hygiene, social distancing**, and shelter-in-place.
- » To ensure continuity of operations, where possible, regular duty will shift to a combination of 1) work at home, 2) only essential on-site lab and field work, and 3) lab and field work at safe distances.
- » The secondary line of defense is **disinfection and material quarantine** to reduce risk of indirect transmission.
- » Most research facilities involve a relatively small number of staff, and the majority of the workload allows for proper **physical distancing**. Where possible, schedules should be developed to help **stagger work assignments and work locations for physical distancing**. For field and lab research that employ larger groups, it is imperative to stagger work assignments in space and time to allow for physical distancing. If a necessary task requires two or more people to complete, they will implement safe distancing.
- » When possible, staff should be “permanently” assigned to specific work spaces. The goal is to minimize direct contact between staff or contact with materials or surfaces touched by others.
- » Instructions for field and lab research will be communicated virtually prior to entering the field/facility.
 - » In-field/lab communication and coordination are very important.
- » Where feasible and appropriate on a daily basis, each team member will update their research tasks for the following day and the remainder of the project duration and store the document in a One Drive folder (or project-specific file sharing service) that is shared with the research team. This document will be prepared with sufficient detail to allow another team member to fill-in (if possible) for a researcher who needs to enter into self-quarantine. In situations in which small research teams are working together on a regular basis, routine communications via email and phone may suffice.
- » Instructional videos will be created whenever possible to train any new personnel in necessary research tasks. These videos will provide baseline instructions which can be followed-up either virtually (preferred) or in person, but while maintaining at least 6’ of separation.

Health of Research Personnel:

- » On a daily basis, research personnel will take their body temperature to ensure they do not have an elevated body temperature ($\geq 100^{\circ}\text{F}$ (37.8°C)).
- » Any researcher who exhibits a fever or other symptoms of Covid-19 will contact his/her supervisor and then enter self-quarantine until healthy (CDC currently recommends two consecutive negative tests 24 hours apart and symptom free) before returning to work.
- » Any person who has experienced potential Covid-19 symptoms during the past 7 days will not engage in research activities unless/until cleared for work by a medical professional or with permission of his/her supervisor.

Health of Research Subjects:

- » If possible, attempts should be made to move research involving direct contact with subjects to virtual platforms.
- » Because in-person research may be required in many cases, these guidelines should be implemented as fully as possible, including social distancing, disinfection and sanitation protocols, etc.
- » Any engagement with subjects in the field should follow the field guidelines in this document.

Safe Distancing, Hand Washing, Disinfection, and Material Quarantining

- » Recommended **social distancing is 6 to 10 feet apart or more.**
 - » If interactions need to take place in person, attempts should be made for these to be conducted with a minimum separation distance of 6 feet and ideally outdoors. In cases, where human subject interaction is necessary at close distances (e.g., obtaining blood pressure), masks should be worn and all appropriate precautions should be taken.
 - » This means **two people should not ride in the same vehicle; take as many vehicles as needed to get to a laboratory or field site safely.** Exceptions may be made if required by research protocols; protecting research staff is paramount.
 - » If within a building, only one or two people should work in shared spaces, at the same time when possible.
- » When possible, research staff should be **“permanently” assigned to specific work spaces and equipment,** etc. The goal is to minimize direct contact between staff or contact with materials or surfaces by more than one person.
 - » Space must be clearly marked to identify the assigned user. If you are unsure, check with the laboratory or field supervisor before proceeding.
 - » **Use only your assigned space or equipment and sanitize before use.** Communicate with staff prior to any exceptions.
- » Use **good hand washing procedures** even when you are the only assigned user.
- » Notify the group when you start working and when you leave. **Make sure at least one person knows when and where you are working and can check on you.**
- » **All staff will wash hands when they arrive daily, at each break, and when they leave at the end of the shift.** Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- » Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
- » **Daily disinfecting** is recommended for commonly touched surfaces, for example, door handles, toilet handles, tools, steering wheels and hand controls of vehicles/tractors, etc. (including lab equipment), and keyboards. A daily checklist is recommended. Treat all common spaces and items as if they are contaminated.

- » Disinfect surfaces following best practices (70% alcohol or other approved disinfectants; be aware of contact time). Wipe surface with disinfecting wipe or spray with disinfectant and wipe with a paper towel. Allow surface to air dry for 10 minutes.
- » Wash hands immediately after disinfecting surfaces and after any potential exposure.
- » All research teams should supplement typical janitorial cleaning with **additional sanitation** of work spaces and equipment.
- » **Material quarantine:** If possible, quarantine all material, samples, and deliveries from outside sources for at least 4 days. (If refrigeration is required, treat material as contaminated and move to cold storage for quarantine period).

Shared Facilities and Research Lab Equipment and Supplies

- » All necessary lab/field equipment will be assigned to specific individuals whenever possible and labeled with that user's name for the duration of the project or field season.
 - » No sharing of equipment or supplies will be permitted once they are distributed to individuals.
 - » When not being used, field equipment and supplies will be stored in a user's personal vehicle or personal storage bin/tote whenever appropriate.
- » Personnel should minimize interactions with others and the potential for cross-contamination in shared facilities/resources or field stations.
 - » For example, personnel should not visit shared resources at the same time if possible.
 - » Shared resources and facilities will be organized in such a way as to minimize opportunities for cross-contamination.
 - » If gloves are available they should be used.
 - » If gloves are not available, personnel will wash or sanitize their hands before and after using supplies.
- » Material quarantine: If possible, quarantine all newly acquired supplies for at least 4 days.
- » Each person will be assigned their equipment/space to operate and will maintain a minimum distance of 6' from other individuals, except when specific circumstances require closer contact (e.g. some procedures involving human research subjects). Often it will be possible to maintain much larger distances.

While distributing materials to coworkers in the lab, field station, or research facility, efforts will be employed to minimize opportunities for cross-contamination, e.g. wearing of gloves when handling items.

- » When possible, a single person should operate the equipment.
 - » If two individuals are needed, practice physical distancing
 - » An exception would be if two individuals live together, or other circumstance that is approved by the appropriate channels
 - » If physical distancing is not possible, pieces of plexiglass shielding will be installed between individuals to provide a physical barrier if possible.

- » Under all circumstances, personnel will wear facial PPE (personal protective equipment).
- » Also, any components of the equipment that will be touched by both individuals will be sanitized to avoid cross-contamination to the extent possible (see cleaning guidelines above). Equipment supervisors should determine equipment that cannot be sanitized and advise personnel accordingly.
- » While in the field/lab/shared facility, researchers will maintain a minimum distance of 6' from other individuals if possible. Often it will be possible to maintain much larger distances.
 - » Given uncertainties regarding viral survival on surfaces under field conditions, whenever possible work areas will be assigned to specific individuals for days at a time, rather than having personnel enter areas worked by others during the previous several days.
 - » Storage depots containing equipment and supplies will be organized to minimize the potential for cross-contamination, and equipment and supplies should not be shared among individuals if possible.

Facility Maintenance and Usage

- » All facility use should be coordinated by the supervisor(s).
- » In facilities where multiple groups and PIs have ongoing operations, coordinate with other groups to ensure appropriate **social distancing** to the extent possible.
- » **No visitors or public events allowed.**

Travel

- » For personnel who must travel in-state to perform their duties, social distancing guidelines will be followed. **If 2 or more people are traveling to the same work place, drive multiple vehicles.**
 - » The only exception to this rule is that researchers who live together may travel together in a shared vehicle.
- » Per University guidelines all travel is **strongly discouraged** and requires prior approval. Returning from university-sponsored travel to areas with a concentration of cases will require a 7-day self-isolation period with no symptoms

Communication

- » Communicate via text, phone and email to avoid direct contact when possible.
- » Check emails regularly for changes and updates.
- » Text, call, or email questions, concerns or problems when possible.

What to do if someone becomes ill and was at the facility?

- » Notify everyone you are working with that you are ill.
- » Shutdown facility for 1 day if possible.
- » With guidance from Environmental Health and Safety and Physical Plant, deep clean all work

areas. Departments are responsible for acquiring cleaning materials. Contact Procurement for assistance acquiring cleaning materials.

- » Ill person may not come back until they have met CDC guidelines for recovery, currently two consecutive negative tests 24 hours apart and no symptoms. Asymptomatic patients can return after seven days.

Guidelines for Preparation of Materials for Field Studies

- » Material preparation should be conducted in an on-campus laboratory or potentially at home.
 - » It is acceptable to prepare materials at home only with prior approval from supervisor provided it is safe to do so, i.e. non-hazardous. For example:
 - » Assembly of a camera for instillation
 - » Labeling of bags for sample collection
- » Each work station should be a minimum of 6' from any other station if possible.
- » If it is necessary to share a laboratory room with others, set stations up on different laboratory benches when possible.
- » If that is not possible, set up stations diagonally across a lab bench from each other rather than directly across from each other.

Data Collection

- » A minimum of 6' will be maintained between individuals while collecting data when possible; note that with some human subject testing, this will not be possible.
- » If one person is measuring something, and another person is recording data, the two individuals must still be separated by a minimum of 6' if possible.
- » Some data collection projects involve the deployment and use of sensors, lasers, cameras etc. to continuously collect data. Wherever possible, the installation and operation of these devices will be conducted in such a way as to maintain 6' of separation between individuals and processes will be conducted in a manner designed to minimize the possibility of cross-contamination (see cleaning guidelines above).

Laboratory Associated Activities

- » Some field-based projects may require limited laboratory access.
- » In such cases appropriate safety measures will be implemented (see guidelines above).

Additional advice is available on the [COVID-19 and Research web page](#) in the *Social Distancing and Mitigating the Risk of Transmission While Conducting Your Research* section.