

GUIDANCE FOR RESEARCH PROGRAMS AT HSC IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 (UPDATED MARCH 18, 2020)

On-site research is ongoing at this time; however, all research laboratories and facilities should be limiting their activities to essential research activities, delaying non-essential research activities if at all possible, and practicing the CDC-recommended good hygiene practices, including social distancing.

It may be necessary in the future to limit employee access to the campus. In this event, you would need to limit research activities to mission-critical activities only and to activate your Research Disaster Plan. The following guidance will assist you in how to manage your laboratory now and how to plan for possible future limited access to campus. Updated information will be communicated by email and posted at <https://research.ouhsc.edu/Resources/COVID-Research-Updates>.

All laboratories should be practicing the CDC-recommended good hygiene practices, including social distancing described here.

- University events (on or off campus) that include 10 or more people must be cancelled, postponed, or held by video conferences.
- Lab meetings should be kept as small as possible, and may include no more than 10 individuals unless mission-critical. Investigators should utilize virtual meetings as much as possible (<https://itscnorman.ou.edu/askit/zoom-for-staff/>).
- Researchers should stay home if they are ill and should be ready to scale back or implement alternate work schedules, if directed to do so.
- While most laboratory activities require personnel in the laboratory, telecommuting is encouraged when possible.

Research Continuity Guidance for Laboratories and Research Facilities

Assumptions that you can use for planning, based on a scenario with widespread COVID-19 communal transmission:

- A significant percentage of your laboratory workforce may be out sick or unable to come to work.
- Essential research infrastructure, such as power and telecommunications, will be maintained as usual.
- Orders for critical supplies may be delayed; plan accordingly to have either a 2-week supply or how to manage if cannot obtain supplies.
- Core facilities and other fee-for-service resources may not be available.
- For researchers with active animal protocols the Division of Comparative Medicine will maintain essential animal husbandry. For information on how to manage animals on an active research protocol, see the Division of Comparative Medicine website: <https://acup.ouhsc.edu/emergency-contacts.html> (Managing Animal Activities During a Disaster).
- For researchers with active human subjects research protocols, the Human Research Participant Protection Program has implemented specific actions regarding human participant research that can be found here: <https://compliance.ouhsc.edu/HRPP/Whats-New/COVID-19-HRPP-Information>
- The Office of Environmental Health and Safety will maintain its essential research support functions, although some lower-priority services may need to be curtailed (e.g., less frequent waste pick-up).
- The Office of Research Administration, Office of Technology Commercialization, Office of Export Controls, Human Research Participant Protection Program (Institutional Review Board), and the Animal Care and Use Program (Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, Office of Animal Welfare) will continue research-related administrative functions to the extent possible.

The University encourages you to develop a Research Disaster Plan by the end of this week (Friday, March 20); see [Research Disaster Plan](#) to assist with developing this plan. Consider how the work of your groups could be slowed for the coming weeks to be prepared for a reduction in operations, and what steps you would follow if the work had to be placed on hold with short notice. The planning you do now will support the long-term success of our laboratories and research groups.

Steps you can take now to ensure continuity of critical functions:

- Identify procedures and processes that require regular personnel attention (e.g., cell culture maintenance, animal studies, CO2 tanks, Liquid nitrogen refills).
- Assess and prioritize critical laboratory activities.
- Identify any research experiments that can be ramped down, curtailed, or delayed.
- Identify personnel able to safely perform essential activities.

- Ensure that you have access to emergency contact information for your critical staff, including cell phone numbers.
- Cross-train research staff to fill in for others who may be out sick or unable to come to work.
- Ensure staff have the appropriate training to cross cover mission-critical tasks (e.g. change CO2 tanks)
- Ensure you are documenting critical step-by-step instructions in your Standard Operating Procedures.
- Coordinate with colleagues who have similar research activities to identify ways to ensure coverage of critical activities.
- Review contingency plans and emergency procedures with researchers and staff.
- Maintain a sufficient inventory of critical supplies that may be impacted by global shipping delays.
- Consider whether current animal studies can be thoughtfully ended to gather important data.
- Prioritize. Depending upon the nature of your research, consider prioritizing work that can be carried out in your research facility, and put off work amenable to remote support, such as data analysis. Stockpiling results and data now that could be analyzed remotely in the future is a potential option that might create future flexibility.
- Perform frequent cleaning of equipment handles, knobs, door handles, etc.
- Minimize beginning critical experiments that will be jeopardized if lab personnel are out of the lab for 2-3 weeks with illness or if the campus temporarily closes.
- Complete animal studies as possible and minimize animal breeding or new longitudinal animal studies that will be jeopardized if personnel are sick or the campus temporarily closes.
- Orders for critical supplies may be delayed during the work slowdown if personnel are sick.
- Core facilities and other fee-for-service resources may not be available as personnel are sick or in isolation.
- While essential personnel including graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, research staff, and technicians are able to continue to work, social distancing, staggered work hours, and frequent hand washing are recommended.

Research continuity summary:

Advance planning will allow everyone in your research group to focus on their own efforts and work together as a team, rather than wondering how they and their team members are to proceed.

Quick Checklist:

1. Identify critical lab operations.
2. Identify critical lab personnel and ensure they know what to do in the event of suspended operations.
3. Remind lab personnel of your communication plan (or create one if not in place).
4. Ensure all staff have remote access to needed files, data, servers, etc.
5. Prioritize experiments.

Visitor Access to OUHSC Research Laboratories:

Only OUHSC employees are allowed in OUHSC research laboratories, effective immediately through at least April 17, 2020. For purposes of this policy, research laboratories include any facility undertaking “wet-bench” research activities.

Visitors to research laboratories are prohibited, as described below:

- No volunteers, including but not limited to OU Norman or other undergraduate student volunteers and OSSM students, are allowed in OUHSC research laboratories through April 17, 2020.
- No visiting faculty, OMRF members, Veterans Affairs members, or OU-Norman faculty are allowed in HSC research laboratories without an advance exemption from the Associate Dean for Research of the college hosting the visitor.
- No family members are allowed into research laboratories.
- In addition, principal investigators should limit non-essential OUHSC personnel access to research laboratories to the minimum necessary to keep critical lab functions operating.