

UPDATED GUIDANCE FOR RESEARCH PROGRAMS AT OUHSC IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 – MARCH 26, 2020

This guidance is for nonhuman subjects research. Current guidance on human subjects research can be found at: <https://compliance.ouhsc.edu/HRPP/COVID-19-Information>.

First and foremost, the Health Sciences Center remains open, and the health and safety of our researchers at OUHSC is our number one priority. To comply with Governor Stitt's March 24 COVID-19 Safer-at-Home order to discontinue nonessential business functions, effectively immediately, all OUHSC researchers should begin an orderly shutdown of all nonessential research. Until further notice, all HSC research and creative activity requiring individuals to work on campus **will be suspended EXCEPT for essential research activities**. Although we are unable to anticipate the exact duration of this suspension of nonessential research activities, we will be evaluating and updating the situation on an ongoing basis and will provide updates as appropriate.

Definition of “Essential Research Activities”

For purposes of this Guidance, Essential Research Activities are defined as:

1. Essential Research

- Work that directly relates to preventing, containing, or treating the COVID-19 pandemic
- Work that directly relates to national security
- Activity that, if discontinued, would pose a safety hazard
- Laboratory work where discontinuation would result in loss of significant data and samples
- Longitudinal work where discontinuation would result in loss of significant data or samples
- Animal work that requires the researcher to perform animal care/experimental work that cannot be done by the Division of Comparative Medicine (such as genotyping, breeding, age-dependent behavioral testing, age-dependent electrophysiology, etc.)
- Long-term ongoing cell culture work such as generation of iPSCs, organoids, etc.

2. Essential Support Activities for Research

- Work to maintain critical equipment, whether in stand-by mode or operational
- Work to maintain critical tissue cultures and animal populations
- Work to maintain critical core research support functions, such as the Laboratory for Molecular Biology and Cytometry Research, Imaging and other federally supported cores (e.g. P30 and CoBRE)
- Research administration, compliance, and other support functions required by law

To Qualify for Essential Research Activities Exemption

To qualify for the Essential Research Activities exemption, the Principal Investigator must complete an Essential Research Activities online [form](#). **This form must be submitted no later than 5 pm, Monday, March 30.** A group of senior researchers will review this form as expeditiously as possible to ensure that essential research is not affected. Once approved, essential personnel identified on the form will be provided access to the buildings where the essential research activities will occur. For essential animal care/experimental work, the Division of Comparative Medicine will be in contact with the Principal Investigator and essential personnel to provide guidance.

Under these new guidelines, it is expected that both nonessential and essential employees who are at home telecommute to perform work duties, such as managing and analyzing data, preparing materials for publication, reading relevant research publications, and other duties assigned by the Principal Investigator. Essential research ongoing in laboratories is still expected to be conducted in a safe work environment to mitigate the risk of spread of COVID-19 virus. Telecommuting should be encouraged as much as possible. Social distancing practices meant to reduce close contact in the workplace (e.g., maintain an approximate distance of 6 feet from others) must be maintained and the CDC-recommended good hygiene practices practiced. Flexible or rotating work schedules for essential personnel where possible should be established. Meetings should be done by phone or virtual formats as much as possible (<https://itscnorman.ou.edu/askit/zoom-for-staff/>). PIs are encouraged to set up a scheduling calendar so their personnel can choose times to work when the workplace may be less crowded. **It is**

the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to notify their personnel and their departmental administrator of the status of personnel in their laboratory as essential or nonessential, on or before 5:00 pm March 30.

Slowdown of all Essential Research Activities

It is expected that essential research activities that meet the criteria stated above be minimized as much as possible and that no new line of experimentation be initiated unless it directly relates to preventing, containing, or treating the COVID-19 pandemic or relates to national security. A research plan of such studies must be sent to VPR@ouhsc.edu for approval. If this research involves animals, the IACUC will conduct a review of a new protocol or an amendment to an existing protocol. The IBC will likewise review any activity that falls under their purview.

Shutdown of Nonessential Research Activities

Shutdown of nonessential research activities should begin immediately and be completed by 5 pm, Monday, March 30. To ensure a safe and orderly shutdown process of nonessential research activities, please refer to the Safety Checklist for Temporary Shutdown of Nonessential Laboratory Activities provided [here](#).

Research Employees

All employees must follow the Human Resources Safer-At-Home Workplace Guidance for COVID-19.

Graduate Students

Graduate Students must work with their Mentors to determine whether they will be conducting essential research. A list of possible telecommuting activities for graduate students can be found [here](#). Graduate students should contact the Graduate College at gradcollege@ouhsc.edu if they have any questions.

Exposure to COVID-19

Any employees who exhibit signs of or know they have been exposed to someone exhibiting signs of COVID-19 should visit the [Student & Employee Health](#) page and fill out the Online Screening Tool.

Questions

For any questions related to this policy, please email VPR@OUHSC.edu