

Guidance for Research-Related Field and Off-Campus Activities During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Last updated: 4/22/2021

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this guidance is to facilitate research-related “field” activities consistent with State of Maine, University of Maine System (UMS) and University of Maine/University of Maine-Machias directives and guidelines to minimize employee, student, and community risks from COVID-19.

These guidelines apply to activities of the University of Maine and University of Maine at Machias. These guidelines more specifically apply to field work activities in outdoor settings on- or off- campus including at university satellite locations (e.g., aquaculture facilities, research farms, Darling Marine Center), and apply to all activities, both in indoor and outdoor settings, occurring at non-university facilities elsewhere in Maine. The above activities are hereafter referred to as “Field Research” for convenience.

Institutional Review

The University has been in Phase Three of the [Plan for Phased Continuity of the Research Enterprise \(PDF\)](#) since August 1, 2020 and are continuing in that Phase for the time being. We appreciate all the good work that everyone has done in conducting research while keeping the community safe, and urge everyone to please remain diligent and continue with the work in keeping our community safe. Please continue to submit your new research activities through the [request form](#) and utilize [UMSpaceSafe](#). This continuing process is necessary to monitor activity and to allow for planning in case circumstances change.

If it becomes necessary to move back to Phase 2, which is more restrictive, some previously approved projects will need to be halted until conditions improve. Researchers with active approvals will be notified via email regarding their phase designation. Questions may be directed to Tammy Crosby at tammy.crosby@maine.edu.

Requests must include a [Hierarchy of Controls \(HOC\) Task Assessment \(Excel\)](#) and a signed [Hierarchy of Controls Checklist \(Word\)](#). Requests will be sent to the applicable College or Center and the Research Continuity Task force for the respective review and recommendation regarding approval. Requests approved by OVPRDGS will be forwarded to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) for coordination with safety and facility management; you may be contacted by one or more of these offices if more information is needed. Notices of approval and other communications will be provided by OVPRDGS, through Tammy Crosby (tammy.crosby@maine.edu).

General Guidance for Fieldwork and Key Review Criteria:

Faculty & staff are encouraged to discuss proposed field work plans with their college or center leadership *before* submitting a request. In addition to the justification regarding why the activity cannot be delayed and how it fits within *Phase 3 of the Plan for Phased Continuity of the Research Enterprise*, key review criteria are noted below:

1. All work conducted by everyone associated with UMaine and UMM must be conducted in accordance with guidance available on the [UMS Health Advisory](#) site and comply with guidance provided by UMS Safety Management which can be found on [the Safety Management website](#).
2. Requests must comply with contemporaneous [UMS COVID-19 travel policies](#). Presently all university-sponsored out-of-state travel is prohibited unless a specific exception is approved. In-state travel is limited; those proposing to travel for fieldwork should consult current UMS COVID guidance for travelers as it is subject to change.
3. As part of Field Research plans, ensure you have conducted a standard fieldwork hazard assessment and have developed a safety plan [using UMS Safety Management's (SM) [Fieldwork Safety Program](#) and [Fieldwork Hazard Assessment/Safety Plan](#) as guides (note: SM's portal page requires an @maine.edu log-in)]. In addition to the standard safety plan, you should also address the elevated risks and extra precautions needed due to the COVID-19 using the [Hierarchy of Controls \(HOC\) Task Assessment \(Excel\)](#) and a signed [Hierarchy of Controls Checklist \(Word\)](#). These considerations must be met:
 - Involves only participants who are asymptomatic and have not been in contact with known symptomatic or positive-testing individuals.
 - Social distancing must occur within the work itself, including physical separation.
 - Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) like respirators, eye protection and gloves are to be used as a last resort, and only when all other protective controls (such as engineering, substitutive, or administrative) have been exhausted. The use of PPE such as an n95 would be an exceptional circumstance, as stock of such protective equipment has been requested by MEMA to support the working medical professionals.
 - Face coverings are required at all times on University of Maine System campuses, property and facilities, both indoors and outside and if traveling on university business in a vehicle with others or engaged in official university business or activities away from campus. See [UMS Health Advisory for Employees](#) for current guidance.
 - Interactions must be kept to a minimum. This includes interactions with the community on and off work, as well as within the team.
 - A clear plan as part of fieldwork safety must include how elements of social distancing, interactions, transportation, emergency actions, training, isolation prior to work, disinfection, touch protocols, and communication related to COVID-19 will be handled.

The response to COVID-19 continues to be a rapidly evolving situation even at this stage of the pandemic and this guidance is subject to change. Please be sure to regularly review available Research Guidelines at the above links. Also, please continue to regularly check the UMS Information page (<https://www.maine.edu/health-advisory/>) and the UMaine Information page (<https://umaine.edu/coronavirus/>).