



Office of Research Compliance

COVID-19 Guidance for Researchers

Updated May 6, 2020

An update in response to [Governor Mills' Stay Safer at Home Executive Order, plan to gradually restart Maine's economy \(PDF\)](#), the Chancellor's extension of the [work from home directive](#) through May 31st, and the [limiting of in-person events, group gatherings, summer camps, day camps or other such in-person activities on its campuses or under its auspices at non-university locations through June 30, 2020](#):

Our primary focus is the safety of faculty, staff, students and the public. As such, we continue to stress that most research and scholarly activity should continue to be conducted away from field sites and university facilities or delayed if possible. The [COVID-19 Research Continuity Task Force](#) is working to draft recommendations for a phased research ramp up which aligns with the Governor's plan and the various UMS/UMaine plans being developed to ramp up operations as safely and controlled as possible. During this time of transition, the definition of essential research and scholarly activity (that require working on campus or a field site) has been expanded effective immediately to include the following (the bullets in bold below are two new additional criteria):

- Research and scholarly activity that is critical to the health of the public
- Research and scholarly activity of national or state importance
- Research and scholarly activity that involves the protection of valuable resources such as cell lines, animal lines, instrumentation requiring regular attention, etc. which cannot be shut down and must be kept going at a basal level
- Research and scholarly activities that directly support current [Business and Operations designated as critical infrastructure](#) in the [Governor's initial mandate: general university research and scholarly activities in those designated areas would not typically qualify as "essential"](#).
- **Research and scholarly activity necessary to avoid prematurely stopping an experiment or research process in progress that would result in an irrecoverable loss.**
- **Research and scholarly activity necessary because experimentation or related activities for the coming year are tightly linked to seasonal phenology and even a short delay will result in long term impact.**

Essential research and scholarly activity conducted at a field site or on campus or a university facility should be conducted in accordance with guidance available on the [UMS Health Advisory](#) site. More specifically – these efforts, once approved, should be conducted with minimal numbers of personnel (less than 10) appropriately distanced and in staggered time schedules in a location, for the minimum amount of time necessary to complete the approved on-site work. All personnel **must** follow available [CDC guidance](#) and take basic preventative measures (which include proper mask usage, distancing procedures, disinfection, hand washing, etc.) to avoid exposure to or infection from coronavirus. Further, the [UMS Safety Management portal](#) (requires an [@maine.edu](#) log-in) has updated guidance and safety checklists for safely returning to work spaces.

Essential research and scholarly activity requests should continue to be submitted using the [request form](#) which has been in place since March 24th. Requests will be sent to the applicable College or Center and the Research Continuity Task force for their respective review and recommendation regarding approval. Requests approved by OVPDRGS will continue to be shared with Safety Management, Facilities Management, and University Police; you may be contacted by one or more of these offices if more information is needed.

As a reminder, COVID-19 Research Guidelines are available at the links below:

- [Research and Graduate School FAQs](#)
- [Graduate School Community Guidelines](#)
- [Office of Research Development Guidelines](#)
- [Office of Research Administration Guidelines](#)
- [Office of Research Compliance Guidelines](#)

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/>).

We, like you, are anxious to get back to normal research operations as soon as we can do so safely. Thank-you for your patience during this time of uncertainty and for all that you do in service of our University, the State and beyond.

Human Subjects Research – **Effective March 18, 2020, still in effect as of 5/6/2020**

In an effort to minimize the risk of contracting or spreading COVID-19 in human subjects research interactions, **all human subjects research involving face-to-face interaction must be paused until further notice, unless they can be conducted remotely, and no study subjects should travel to UMaine/UMM.**

Researchers may need to modify their procedures, to replace in-person study visits with "remote" options for questionnaires, surveys, check-ins, screening, and consenting. **Remember that these changes must be approved in advance by the IRB as a Modification to the study.** If you have any questions about whether a remote option is possible contact the IRB office at umric@maine.edu. *The IRB staff and the IRB will prioritize these modifications.*

Animal Research – **Effective March 20, 2020, still in effect as of 5/6/2020**

In order to provide clear guidance for research involving animals during this time of decreased operational activity, IACUC has provided the following guidance:

1. All breeding of commercially available animals should cease immediately. No new breeding pairs should be set up for non-commercially available animals. If your research requires you to continue breeding (i.e., strains that are specially bred and/or irreplaceable), please email your request to UMaine's Attending Veterinarian, Jim Weber (jaweber@maine.edu) with copy to the IACUC (umric@maine.edu). Your request should include the following information:
 1. Animal strain, including all nomenclature
 2. Current number of adults
 3. Original source where strain was purchased / donated
 4. Are live animals of this strain still available from this source? If not, are cryopreserved individuals available?
 5. Is data currently being collected on these animals? If so, when do you estimate that the current replicate of this project will be completed?
 6. Will the Lab need additional animals to complete data collection for this particular replicate?
 7. Are these animals being managed for an experiment that is not currently active?

All requests will be reviewed within 24 hours by UMaine's Institutional Veterinarian, IACUC and the applicable lab manager.

2. Only those experiments that are time-sensitive and already have animals present or on order should be completed as long as proper social distancing protocols, [as recommended by the CDC](#), can be maintained. Permission by the applicable Lab Manager must be obtained prior to performing any experiments in close quarters. Please email your request to the appropriate lab manager with copy to the IACUC (umric@maine.edu). Your request should include applicable IACUC protocol number(s), a description of the experiment, and how it is essential research as defined above. All requests will be reviewed within 24 hours by UMaine's Institutional Veterinarian, IACUC and the applicable lab manager.

New animal experiments should not be started unless directly related to COVID-19 research and in consultation with IACUC.

3. For animals that would normally be euthanized at end of study, please euthanize as soon as your data is collected. Also, review current animals in your colony and consider euthanasia if no longer needed. *For USDA covered species, you should consult with UMaine's Institutional Veterinarian prior to any euthanasia decisions.*

The IACUC, through the Office of Research Compliance, will continue to review submissions (both new protocols and amendments) to the committee during this time, however, while the University is directed to limit research to essential activities and animal husbandry **no new animal studies are to be initiated during this period.** We understand this guidance will be highly impactful to many research programs, and we appreciate your commitment to sustaining our UMaine animal research program through this challenging time.

Additional guidance to assist you in finalizing your contingency plans to ensure appropriate care for the animals in your facility in the event of reduced staff due to illness:

- Review and update facility/lab disaster plans to ensure emergency contact information is up to date.
- Remind your lab personnel of your communication plan to ensure all are informed; if you do not have such a plan in place we urge you to create one.
- Coordinate animal care responsibility, and back-up in the event of staff illness.
- Maintain a sufficient inventory of critical supplies, such as food and bedding, that may be impacted by global shipping delays.
- Consider reducing/postponing procedures that require intensive post-procedural care and/or intensive monitoring for humane endpoints. Please note that OLAW's expectation is that protocols are followed and non-compliance would still need to be reported to OLAW.
- *You may wish to consult with the attending veterinarian (jaweber@maine.edu or 581-2774) while developing your plan.*

Please contact the Office of Research Compliance for assistance (umric@maine.edu).

Biosafety

May 15, 2020 Update from the NIH Office of Science Policy: The NIH Office of Science Policy has issued Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) regarding interim biosafety guidance for research with SARS-CoV-2 and relevant Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) requirements under the [NIH Guidelines](#). Appendix B of the [NIH Guidelines](#) provides the basis for the classification of biohazardous agents by Risk Group (RG). At the present time, SARS-CoV-2 best meets the definition of a RG3 agent and IBCs should consider the agent to be RG3 as a starting point in their risk assessments when reviewing research subject to the [NIH Guidelines](#). The RG classification may change over time as additional information about the virus, such as potential treatments or the development of an effective vaccine, becomes available.

For additional interim biosafety guidance for research with SARS-CoV-2 and IBC requirements under the [NIH Guidelines](#) please visit: <https://osp.od.nih.gov/biotechnology/interim-lab-biosafety-guidance-for-research-with-sars-cov-2/>.

Laboratory Operations

As noted above, on-site work requires approval at this time, and should involve the minimum amount of time necessary to complete the approved on-site work with minimal personnel. Essential research and scholarly activity requests should continue to be submitted using the [request form](#) which has been in place since March 24th.

Prevention:

The overarching goal of the University's actions is to minimize the risk of the spread of COVID-19 and to safeguard the health and safety of the UMaine community. At this time, everyone must practice physical distancing ("maintaining distance -approximately 6 feet or 2 meters- from others when possible").

- Approved work should be conducted with minimum numbers of personnel (less than 10).
- Consider implementing staggered schedules so that researchers can avoid close contact.
- Remind your staff and students to take basic [preventative measures](#) to avoid exposure to or infection from coronavirus, including:
 - Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
 - Stay home if they are sick
 - Disinfect common laboratory areas and frequently touched surfaces (e.g. doorknobs, sink handles, freezer doors, fume hood sashes, telephones) with an [EPA-Registered Disinfectant for Use Against SARS-CoV-2](#).
- Employees (students & staff) should self-report any travel, particularly out of state, to their supervisor. Together they should refer to the UMaine COVID website (<https://umaine.edu/coronavirus/>) and discuss options such as self-quarantine. If the student feels sick upon returning, they should self-isolate and call a doctor immediately.
- Limit tours and visitors. When necessary to have visitors, external visitors to laboratories should exercise the same precautions as internal laboratory users.

Building Access

During this time of minimal on-site presence, university buildings are locked at all times. Researchers approved to conduct essential research activity can use their MaineCard or key(s) to access buildings for which they are allowed access. Should you need assistance, please call UMaine PD (207-581-4040). This is a good time also to update signage on doors of labs and facilities with primary and secondary emergency contact information if you haven't already done so.

Hazardous Waste

If you intend on continuing to generate hazardous waste (flammable, corrosive, toxic, etc.) and storing it in a designated Satellite Accumulation Area (which would be within your work area), you are responsible for maintaining weekly inspections. *Hazardous waste cannot be left unattended.* Safety Management recommends that you consider removing all hazardous waste from your Satellite Accumulation Area. Please contact Pete Snow (peter.snow@maine.edu).

Field Research Operations

Faculty and staff are encouraged to defer all non-essential field research through at least May 30th. [Specific guidance for field research \(PDF\)](#) has been developed to provide an overview of key review criteria and safety considerations for essential fieldwork activity between now and May 30th (current expiration of the Chancellor's Work Remotely directive) and general guidance for fieldwork planned beyond May 30th. The key takeaway for planning for late summer early summer fieldwork is to be prepared but flexible.

General Information

Please refer to the UMS Information page (<https://www.maine.edu/health-advisory/>) and the UMaine/UMM Information page (<https://umaine.edu/coronavirus/>) for the most current updates. Have more research-related questions? Please review the [UMaine Research and Graduate School COVID-19 FAQ](#).

