

Office of Research Compliance

COVID-19 Guidance for Researchers

Updated June 2, 2020

An update regarding release of the University's [Plan for Phased Continuity of the Research Enterprise \(PDF\)](#), and regarding the submission and approval of research and scholarly activity requests: The Plan, which has been approved by the university, has been prepared by the [COVID-19 Research Continuity Task Force](#). It aligns with the Governor's plan to gradually restart Maine's economy and the UMS/UMaine plans under consideration to ramp up operations as safely and as controlled as possible. The task force, in developing the plan, has worked closely with the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), University Police, Safety Management, and Facilities Management, and has also taken into consideration inputs received from the faculty and university leadership.

Given that the Chancellor's extension of the [work from home directive](#) extends through June 30, 2020, we must continue to stress that research that can be done remotely should continue to be done remotely, as we gradually expand the number of people on-campus or for on-site activity, while maintaining physical distancing and other risk reduction procedures. Moreover, before conducting home lab experiments that require lab safety controls, please contact your supervisor to discuss opportunities to conduct those labs on campus, potential deferral or other options. Further, 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](#).

Effective June 1, 2020, we have entered Phase Two of the [Plan for Phased Continuity of the Research Enterprise \(PDF\)](#) which is characterized as a limited increase in on-site activity. Accordingly, essential research and scholarly activity (that require working on campus or in the field) have been expanded to include the following areas (the bullets in bold below are 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.

Phase 2 expansion:

- **Prioritize access for graduate students and postdocs close to completing their degree/term of appointment.**
- **Prioritize research for completion of grants and contracts where no cost extensions are not feasible.**
- **Prioritize research activities which are required to maintain employment of critical research personnel.**
- **Begin re-breeding laboratory animals, expansion of cell lines, plant propagation, etc.**
- **Research Centers: restart facilities based on sufficient 'customer' demand (approved projects) where work cannot be done remotely and those facilities have approved safety protocols, PPE, tracking mechanisms in place.**
- **Allow access to offices for faculty and graduate students on application, 1-3 days/week. Must maintain physical distancing and max occupancy per building**
- **Field Research – expand on case by case basis (depending on local conditions/restrictions at field sites, travel restrictions, ability to travel safely and ability to physically distance at field sites)**
- **Humanities, arts and social sciences research that requires access to single occupancy spaces (e.g. office, private studio), and allow use of libraries, archives, labs, and collections to limited numbers of researchers using hygiene and physical distancing protocols. Close proximity training such as a clinical environment/ lab/ performance space/ practice/ studio element [or other special delivery mode (lab training, graduate mentoring)].**

Research & Scholarly Activity requests will continue to be submitted using the [request form](#) which has been in place since March 24th, however all requests must now 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 support for return to work requests; 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 my office, through Tammy Crosby (tammy.crosby@maine.edu).

Field Research

Faculty and staff are encouraged to defer all non-essential field research through at least June 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 June 30th (current expiration of the Chancellor's Work Remotely directive) and general guidance for fieldwork planned beyond June 30th. The key takeaway for planning for early to late summer fieldwork is to be prepared but flexible.

Human Subjects Research – **Effective March 18, 2020, still in effect as of 6/2/2020**

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 – **Updated 6/2/2020**

ORC is working to update IACUC guidance for Phase 2. Breeding and experiments should both be minimal, and each requires prior approval (using the Research & Scholarly Activity [request form](#)) in addition to an approved IACUC protocol. In the interim, before initiating breeding, 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.

Before initiating an approved Research & Scholarly Activity which involves animals, please note that 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 date of approval by the OVPRDGS. All requests will be reviewed within 24 hours by UMaine's Institutional Veterinarian, IACUC and the applicable lab manager.

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 activities and animal husbandry **only animal studies approved through the OVPRDGS Research and Scholarly Activity Requests may 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.

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

Building Access

During this time of reduced 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).

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](#).

