

Research Operations and COVID-19 Monitoring: Criteria and Responses

September 23, 2020

Research operations are subject to state, local, and campus restrictions. Compared to instructional activities, research activities have fewer people in any one space and generally involve fewer people moving through a building on an hourly basis. Therefore, the approach is to control the use of individual research facilities/laboratories based on COVID-19 occurrences to avoid further spread of the virus.

When classes are in session, it is important to recognize that faculty, staff, and student researchers have a higher risk of exposure to the virus. Lead researchers are required to review their Research Operations Safety Plan with their group on at least a quarterly basis and post a copy in the research space. Deans may shut down a research facility if the Safety Plan is not followed.

With the reopening of UWM's research facilities, it is necessary to establish the COVID-19 monitoring criteria and responses that will be used for these facilities. Research activities are only allowed under the guidance of a [Research Operations Safety Plan](#) and appropriate training of all on-site personnel. Safety Plans also include plans for continuing research operations if some staff are unable to work on-site. If campus closes in-person classes, research activities conducted under approved Safety Plans may continue.

A. Facilities

The following processes are required at all UWM research sites on and off the main Kenwood campus.

1. Reporting COVID-19 cases or exposure

All researchers (whether paid or voluntary) who exhibit COVID-19 symptoms, or have been diagnosed with COVID-19, or have been identified as a close contact of a person who is COVID-19-positive, must (a) cease work if on-site and (b) contact the lead researcher for their project (whether on-site or not). The lead researcher or supervisor must report any cases for both employees and non-employees in their research group following the procedures outlined in the [UWM On-site Employee Work Practices During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

Researchers need to recognize that the consequences from any confirmed cases of COVID-19 or exposure to the virus may include:

- Self-quarantine of individuals who have been in "close contact" with individuals diagnosed with COVID-19. They may return for on-site work if they remain symptom-free for 14 days.
- Isolation of individuals who have confirmed cases for COVID-19. They may return if at least 10 days have passed since the onset of symptoms and at least 24 hours have passed without a fever.

2. Laboratory cleaning and use

- The research space will be closed if a person with COVID-19 symptoms or a COVID-19 diagnosis was on-site during the 48 hours before or any time after symptoms developed or received a positive test.
- US&A will request cleaning if appropriate and needed. Alternatively, the researcher, supervisor, department chair and/or Dean may determine that the space may be closed for 7 days and no cleaning will be required.
- If two cases are reported from a research laboratory within a 14-day period, the facility will be closed for cleaning. It cannot be reoccupied for 7 days.
- If two laboratories on the same floor are closed due to COVID infections within 14 days, all research spaces on that floor will be closed for cleaning and cannot be reoccupied for 7 days.

B. Research Involving Human Subjects

If any member of the research team exhibits COVID-19 symptoms or is exposed to an individual with confirmed or suspected occurrence of COVID-19, face-to-face work with human subjects must cease. Researchers may recommence face-to-face human subject research if all on-site members of the research team are either (a) tested and returned negative results, or (b) team members have undergone a 14-day self-quarantine without expressing symptoms of COVID-19. Research personnel and the facility are also subject to the requirements of item (a).

C. Research Involving Animals

Current research studies that use animal subjects will be allowed to continue unless restricted by official agencies. New studies are not allowed to begin without US&A approval of a Research Operations Safety Plan that includes appropriate animal care provisions.

If UWM Animal Care staff are unavailable to complete daily animal care responsibilities due to COVID-19 exposure or infection, researchers will be required to complete daily animal care responsibilities. If Animal Care staff or the researcher's staff are not able to provide animal care, animal subjects may need to be euthanized as a last resort. Researchers with animal subjects are required to discuss in advance with Animal Care staff how these needs would be addressed.

D. Field Research

Field studies will be allowed to continue if investigators have an approved Research Operations Safety Plan and are approved for On-Site Employee Work status. Safety Plans must conform with the [UWM Guidelines for Field Research During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

- As in the case of on-campus research settings, all researchers who exhibit COVID-19 symptoms, or have been diagnosed for COVID-19, or have been identified as a close contact of a person that is COVID-19-positive must (a) cease work if on-site and (b) contact the lead researcher for their project. The lead researcher or supervisor must report any cases following the procedures in the [UWM On-site Employee Work Practices During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).
- If two cases are reported from a field research team within a 14-day period, the research will be suspended for 7 days.

E. Transportation Between UWM Research Sites

Faculty, staff, and students who must travel between UWM research sites (e.g., from the main campus to the School of Freshwater Sciences, Josef J. Zilber School of Public Health, Innovation Park) may continue their research activities if they follow the safety protocols at the research location. Individuals who use campus shuttles must follow the COVID-19 safety protocols for their use. Personal vehicles may be used, but if multiple people ride in a personal vehicle to or from a research site, no more than two people may occupy a vehicle to and from the work site. Cloth face coverings (i.e., masks) must be worn in vehicles when they are used by two people who are not from the same household. High-touch areas (i.e., truck keys, door handles, and steering wheel) must be disinfected before and after each use.

F. New Grant Awards and Contracts

When UWM receives new research awards and contracts, the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) will not release the funds unless the lead investigator has an approved Research Operations Safety Plan for the UWM space in which the research will take place. OSP will use the Safety Plan Dashboard to determine the status of these plans.

G. Emergency Closure of Facilities

In exceptional circumstances, local health authorities or campus may need to close specific buildings or campus. As was done in Spring 2020, essential research activities will be identified within the parameters of such an emergency.