

General Policies for Re-opening Research at TWU

Goal

The overall goal is to allow researchers on/from the Denton, Dallas, and Houston campuses to carry on with their important work while keeping TWU faculty, staff, and students safe.

Contingencies:

- The plan is dependent on current CDC, state and local guidelines and may be altered if the COVID-19 situation worsens or if guidelines change.
- Any individual who is sick or experiencing symptoms should not come to campus.

Guiding Principles

Principle #1: Follow local, State, and National Public Health Authority directives to shelter-at-home and maintain physical distancing.

Principle #2: Protect the mental and physical health and safety of the research workforce, clinical patients and human research subjects.

- No researcher should feel they are being compelled to work on campus or in the field during periods of shelter-at-home directives.
- Safe practices within laboratories must be rigorously maintained, with adequate access to PPE and other safety related supplies.

General Guidelines

- **Protect Yourself and Others:** CDC guidelines of social distancing of 6 feet or greater, hand-washing (minimum of 20 seconds with soap), covering mouth and nose, cough etiquette, cleanliness, and sanitation should be rigorously practiced.
- **Face Coverings:** [Face coverings](#) must be worn inside at all times except in a private office and outside in areas where social distancing is difficult to maintain.
- **Health Checks:** Prior to coming to work, individuals must self-screen for any of the following new or worsening signs or symptoms of possible COVID-19: cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache,

sore throat, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea, feeling feverish or a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit, or known close contact with a person who is lab-confirmed or diagnosed to have COVID-19. If you have any of the symptoms on any work day, do not come on campus. Contact your immediate supervisor as soon as reasonably possible and see [TWU's coronavirus website](#) for reporting requirements.

- **Common Areas:** People are discouraged from eating together or gathering in common areas, such as kitchens or break rooms and these areas, including appliances, must be cleaned regularly.
- **Non-Laboratory Work:** Tasks, such as lab meetings, data analysis, literature review, and proposal editing that can be accomplished outside of the lab should be conducted remotely whenever possible.
- **General Lab Safety:** Follow all standard [chemical hygiene and lab safety practices](#), including safety procedures for working alone on hazardous tasks.
- **Disinfecting Labs:** Disinfect labs, common research areas and high-touch surfaces (lab benches, doorknobs, sink handles, freezer doors, fume hood sashes, keyboards, microscopes, etc.) frequently, and always at the end of each "shift." Principal Investigators must designate one or more individuals responsible for cleaning and disinfecting and ensure adequate cleaning is adhered to.
- **Disinfecting Equipment:** Minimize the sharing of equipment and devices. If they need to be shared, thoroughly disinfect the device between uses by different individuals.
- **Visitors:** No visitors are allowed in research spaces except for the purpose of delivery, maintenance, repairs, or research collaboration that cannot be conducted remotely.

Please refer to the [Social Distancing in Research Labs factsheet](#) for detailed information.

Research Maintenance and Ramp Down

March 19- May 6

- **Non face-to-face Human Subjects Research continues from pre-COVID. Observational and clinical research that can be conducted at a distance can continue.**
 - Telephone, videoconferencing, mailed survey data collection, studies of record review, or those with non face-to-face data collection can resume.
- Essential Personnel to include those in animal research care and Vivarium.

Gradual Reopening Stages

- Returning faculty and senior graduate students form a focus of the early stages of research ramp up, so that funded projects and doctoral dissertations that are closest to completion can continue.
- Prior to commencing research, Principal Investigators should go through the checklist provided below.

Research Stage 1: Pre Operational Research

May 6 – June 1

Access granted to a limited number of faculty, students and staff to begin preparations for research to re-open. Focus on key personnel and funded researchers. Building signups are recommended to limit crowding and facilitate contact tracing if necessary. Preparation for animal research is prioritized due to the fact that animal work is time-sensitive because colonies are aging and the window for certain experiments is limited. Many animals will have to be euthanized if research does not commence in a timely fashion, wasting state and federal research funds.

- **Non face-to-face Human Subjects Research continues from pre-COVID. Observational and clinical research that can be conducted at a distance can continue.**

Examples:

- Telephone, videoconferencing, mailed survey data collection, or studies of record review, or non face-to-face testing can resume.
- Studies conducted via virtual, electronic, or online methods
- Data analysis of data collected prior to pause of an active study
- Secondary use of data
- Animal researchers can begin to enter labs in preparation for IACUC protocol reactivation.
- No more than 6 people may sign up to work in the building at one time. No more than two people per may occupy a lab space at the same time, and only as long as social distancing can be maintained (separated by 6 feet). For small spaces where a 6 foot distance between people is not possible, only one person may work at a time.
- Try to avoid having more than 3 people per floor working in the building at one time. Cloth face coverings (aka masks) should be worn inside buildings.
- If you plan to use common equipment, please note this on a signup sheet directed by the Department Chair or Director, so other people can plan their experiments accordingly.

Indicate your plans on the Google calendar sign up for that instrument as well as on the Google building access signup sheet.

- All PIs and students will follow the standard laboratory practice for working alone, such as texting the PI or group upon entering and exiting the building.
- Take care with trash, as custodial service is extremely limited. If food is brought in for a snack, food wrappers and waste should be taken back out to minimize garbage accumulation.

Work should be limited to specific procedures or experiments that must be conducted in the lab facility. Any other work that can be done remotely will continue to be done remotely. Refer to the or details.

Research Stage 2

In person research in which risk can be mitigated to a minimal level if the following can be ensured: physical distancing or the use of appropriate PPE

Part 1

May 18 –June 1

Full Social Distancing Research per general guidelines from EHS. Continued focus on key personnel and graduate students who are in an advanced stage of research or expertise. More detailed guidelines should be developed for individual disciplines, buildings and principal investigators for the protection of their faculty, students, and staff, as appropriate. Building sign ups should be maintained to limit crowding, especially in shared spaces.

- Non face-to-face Human Subjects Research continues from pre-COVID. Observational and clinical research that can be conducted at a distance can continue (see examples above).
- Previously deactivated IACUC protocols reactivated.
- Faculty may begin ordering research supplies. Staff will facilitate orders (with approvals) and aid in retrieval of items from Central Receiving.

Part 2

June 1 –TBD

Limited Social Distancing Research per general [guidelines from EHS](#). More detailed guidelines should be developed for individual disciplines, buildings and principal investigators for the protection of their faculty, students, and staff, as appropriate.

Building sign ups should be maintained to limit crowding, especially in shared spaces. ***NOTE that directors and academic leadership have access to their respective campuses as of June***

1 (pending local shelter in place orders); faculty have access on June 15; those faculty and staff who intend to work on campus prior to full reopening will do so with approval of their supervisor and must complete required [training](#).

NOTE: The new Scientific Research Commons was scheduled for completion in July, but due to unforeseen issues due to the pandemic, the timeline has been pushed back. Nevertheless, research labs in GRB will be shut down and moved beginning in July. The expectation is that the new building will be occupied by the early fall 2020 term.

For labs from the GRB, the month of June should be used to complete important experiments and ramp down so lab materials and equipment can be packed for the forthcoming move to SRC.

Research may begin in the new SRC as approved by university officials; refer to the TWU website at <https://twu.edu/coronavirus/> for the latest information on campus access. Faculty and students have keycard access and continue to use signups and social distancing to minimize crowding and prevent transmission.

Human Subjects Research (HSR)

On June 15, 2020, some HSR was allowed to resume if it was approved by the Vice Provost of Research and Innovation, indicated having safety measures in place, had modified the respective IRB to add the risk of exposure to Covid- 19 to consent forms, and had re-consented current participants.

On June 24th the Chancellor posted a message entitled [Success through flexibility](#) which indicated that the original plan for all to return to campus (and for HSR to restart) in July, 2020 would change. Due to a steady increase in the surge of cases in mid-summer 2020, the trend of flexibility continues and the opening date has shifted. The most recent information about the return to campus targeted dates is posted on the website at <https://twu.edu/coronavirus/>.

Thus, for those faculty and students who intend to seek approval for resuming studies prior to the campus re-opening date must complete a Request for Exception to Resume Face to Face Research and have sought and attained updated IRB approval. This request must be made to the Vice Provost for Research and Innovation using the form found on the website at <https://twu.edu/research/>.

Campus re-opening date*

Face-to-face human research studies in which Covid-19 risk can be mitigated to a minimal level may resume if a PI has modified the IRB protocol to add the risk of exposure to Covid-19 (including to the consent form), included necessary safety measures, and re-consented new or continuing participants. Studies where the Covid-19 risks cannot be mitigated or studies where the PI does not want to modify the protocol to address risks associated with Covid-19 cannot resume face-to-face procedures at this time.

*Target dates will be highly dependent on ongoing updates to federal, state, local, and institutional policies related to physical distancing and allowed activities and based on continuous monitoring of the guidelines. Refer to the TWU website at <https://twu.edu/coronavirus/> for the latest information on campus access.

Requirements for Human Subject Research Studies

Researchers must maintain plans and be prepared to halt all activities on short notice if this becomes necessary.

Remote activities as possible. Meetings with staff, collaborators, and students should continue to be conducted virtually. To the extent possible, study activities with participants that can be done remotely should be done that way. For example, this might include screening or follow-up activities.

COVID-19 screening of staff before in-person interactions. Staff should self-screen daily prior to coming to work in accordance with TWU's self-screening procedure.

All studies that meet the criteria to continue must include the following procedures:

- **Avoid all participants with confirmed or presumptive positive COVID-19 infection** by prescreening via phone or email for [COVID-19 symptoms](#) the day before their arrival, and screened again upon arrival. Individuals with active symptoms or in social isolation (e.g., due to travel history or exposure to someone with COVID-19 symptoms) should be avoided.
- **Decrease potential exposure for participants and study staff** at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19. People at higher risk include any of the following:
 - Over 60 years of age
 - With underlying health conditions, including heart disease, lung disease, obesity (BMI of 30 or higher), or diabetes
 - With weakened immune systems
 - Who are pregnant
 - Caregivers of children with underlying health conditions
- **Reduce face-to-face contact with research participants.** For example, this may be accomplished by including barriers between research personnel and participants, and/or using technology (e.g., telephone, facetime, email, intercoms) to conduct interviews and obtain data.
- **Address Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) needs/status** for clinical research personnel who need to be within 6 feet of participants, if appropriate for the study. Address methods to reduce PPE usage by all personnel, including limiting requests for second blood draws and sample collections by clinical personnel to limit contact, and maintain PPE supplies in

times of shortages.

- **Adhere to strict disinfection protocols in accordance with CDC and EPA guidelines.** Surfaces, equipment, furniture, etc. must be disinfected after each participant, in addition to daily enhanced cleaning protocols.
- **6-foot physical distancing must be maintained at all times, when practical.** If not able to be maintained for research purposes (e.g. drawing blood), the participant is required to wear a cloth face covering, at a minimum, and the researcher is required to wear adequate personal protective equipment (face covering, surgical mask, respirator, face shield, gloves, gown, etc.) depending on a risk assessment.
- **Research participants should not bring guests to the visit.** Children and adults who require assistance may have one caregiver. If a caregiver is present, the caregiver must also be screened prior to the visit as outlined above.

New enrollment. Researchers should carefully consider whether new enrollment is advisable on a study-by-study basis. Factors to consider include:

- The nature of the study population (e.g., high risk for COVID-19)
- Whether the possibility of COVID-19 infection is outweighed by the probable direct and meaningful benefit to individual participants
- The impact on clinical resources, facilities, and supplies that may be or become limited

Research Stage 3

In person research in which risk cannot be mitigated to minimal levels

No timeline yet

These studies will not be permitted until risk is naturally reduced to minimal levels, later in the post-pandemic process.