

October 21, 2020

Dear UNBC Researchers and Staff,

RE: COVID-19 UNBC Chair Bulletin #3 – Research involving human participants

In response to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, we are writing to update our guidelines regarding the conduct of research and to directly address requirements to commence or resume in-person research. In this briefing, we address general principles guiding the conduct of research during COVID-19, as well as specific guidelines for the conduct of in-person and on-campus research with human participants. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated requirements for physical distancing, remote modes of research remain the safest option and researchers are reminded that restrictions and requirements may change at short notice. The UNBC Office of Research and UNBC Research Ethics Board will continue to monitor the situation, as updated by the Provincial Health Officer, and will continue to work with researchers to ensure that their research complies with the TCPS2 and COVID-19 guidelines.

General principles

- Remote modes of research remain the safest and preferred option and researchers are asked to avoid in-person interactions where possible.
- Non-essential travel between communities should be avoided.
- For research that cannot be undertaken using remote methods, or where research can no longer be delayed, the studies must undergo review by the UNBC Research Ethics Board and researchers must obtain an approved [Safe Research Plan](#). This applies to all new studies, as well as those that are resuming in-person research activities or were previously deferred due to COVID-19.
- Researchers are encouraged to consider the additional burden placed on potential research participants and sites due to COVID-19 and to consider the timing of their research and plans for data collection.
- Researchers should be aware that we may be required to adopt new procedures or return to previous restrictions on in-person research (as outlined in our March and June bulletins) at any point and at short notice should the COVID-19 situation change, as monitored and updated by the Provincial Health Officer. Researchers are asked to check

the [UNBC Office of Research](#) and [Office of the Provincial Health Officer](#) websites regularly for updates.

- Studies of COVID-19 health outcomes will continue to receive an expedited review, as per the provincial plan. Please ensure that any COVID-19 health outcomes applications are named accordingly so that they can be easily identified.
- New studies that do not involve in-person research activities and do not pose any direct COVID-19 related risks to researchers, staff, or participants will be reviewed using standard procedures.

In-person research activities

- For research where remote methods are not feasible, the research must undergo review by the UNBC Research Ethics Board and must obtain an approved Safe Research Plan. This applies to all new studies, as well as those that are resuming in-person research activities or were previously deferred due to COVID-19.
- Researchers are asked to consult the UNBC Office of Research 'Principles and Guidance for New and Resuming In-Person Research at UNBC During the COVID-19 Pandemic' document for specific guidance on the creation and management of a Safe Research Plan. The UNBC Research Ethics Board and UNBC Office of Research will review respective applications for REB and Safe Research Plan approval simultaneously.
- When submitting an amendment to the UNBC Research Ethics Board, researchers are asked to provide the following additional information:
 - Application Form:
 - A justification for commencement or resumption of in-person research activities.
 - The identification of any virtual methods which will be available as an option to participants in the event in-person research is again halted for COVID-19 mitigation.
 - A detailed overview of risk and mitigation strategies for the research location, study population, and research team. This should address both general and COVID-19 risks.
 - Participant Information and Consent Form:
 - A clear statement of general and COVID-19 risks.
 - A clear statement of limits to anonymity and confidentiality due to contact tracing requirements.
 - Site Permissions:
 - All necessary consents and permissions for research activities need to be updated to include any site-specific COVID-19 considerations. This will include researchers working within communities and community organizations. Please also note that some First Nation/Inuit/Métis

communities are restricting access and travel within their communities.

- It is the researchers' responsibility to ensure that appropriate consultation and permissions are in place prior to any data collection, and these consultations remain open and ongoing. Researchers are asked to consider the comfort and needs of communities when planning the commencement or resumption of any in-person research activities, initiating contact and consultation as conditions change.
- Researchers that do not see guidelines that best fit the needs of their research are asked to contact the UNBC Research Ethics Board directly.

On-campus research that involves human participants

- On-campus research includes all research undertaken within UNBC sites, including indoor and outdoor spaces, classrooms, and laboratories.
- General requirements for the return to campus, as outlined on the UNBC website (<https://www.unbc.ca/coronavirus>), must be followed, including the completion of the UNBC return-to-campus planning online training module and [Exposure Control Plan Checklist](#). Please see website for further information.
- For research where remote methods are not feasible, the research must undergo review by the UNBC Research Ethics Board and researchers must obtain an approved Safe Research Plan. This applies to all new studies, as well as those that are resuming on-campus research activities or were previously deferred due to COVID-19.
- When submitting an amendment to the UNBC Research Ethics Board, researchers are asked to provide the following additional information:
 - Application Form:
 - A justification for commencement or resumption of on-campus research activities.
 - The identification of any virtual methods which will be available as an option to participants in the event in-person research is again halted for COVID-19 mitigation.
 - A detailed overview of risk and mitigation strategies for the research location, study population, and research team. This should address both general and COVID-19 risks.
 - Participant Information and Consent Form:
 - A clear statement of general and COVID-19 risks.
 - A clear statement of limits to anonymity and confidentiality due to contact tracing requirements.

Useful resources and links

British Columbia (BC) Centre for Disease Control - <http://covid-19.bccdc.ca/>

BC Centre for Disease Control – BC Dashboard -

<https://governmentofbc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/11bd9b0303c64373b5680df29e5b5914>

BC Centre for Disease Control – COVID-19 – <https://bc.thrive.health/>

Public Health Agency of Canada – Coronavirus Disease - <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

WorkSafe BC – COVID-19 Safety Plan - <https://www.worksafebc.com/en/resources/health-safety/checklist/covid-19-safety-plan>

World Health Organization Getting your workplace ready -

<https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf>

[UNBC COVID-19 webpage](#)

Please continue to be aware that the COVID-19 situation is dynamic, and researchers are to seek updates on the conditions and concerns of their research site frequently. Updates from the Research Ethics Board will be made as necessary in future bulletins. Please also note that the UNBC Research Ethics Board and other partnering boards are experiencing higher volumes of applications and amendments to research protocols with increased complexity at this time. We are working to address these demands in a timely manner, please recognize that some delays may occur. If you require further clarification please contact the Research Ethics Board at reb@unbc.ca or contact Isobel Hartley, Research Ethics Officer at Isobel.Hartley@unbc.ca.

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Chair, Research Ethics Board

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