

Guidelines for UNBC Personnel Conducting Research During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic

Updated February 2021

Background

Canada's municipal, provincial, and federal governments have acknowledged the severity of the 2020 global COVID-19 pandemic and have undertaken critical actions that are intended to slow the spread and lethality of COVID-19 infections. These currently include the following:

1. Requests and orders to limit travel to avoid the virus' spread between localities.
2. Physical distancing to avoid virus transmission (at least two meters).
3. Suspension of social gatherings and events other than with immediate household members.
4. Mandatory two-week quarantine periods for people travelling to Canada from outside of Canada and for people who are exhibiting any symptoms of coronavirus infection.
5. Posting of occupancy limits.
6. Mandatory use of masks in indoor public spaces.

A tremendous amount of uncertainty is associated with the pandemic, and it is likely that plans for research activities will have to be modified as the actions listed above become more or less restrictive in response to changing infection levels.

The purpose of this document is to provide an update on process and guidelines to assist researchers to adjust research activities as the situation changes.

General Guidelines

- Researchers should regularly review information provided by UNBC for research-related updates in response to COVID-19.
- Supervisors must review safety protocols with regard to COVID-19 and provide training on the appropriate use of PPE, especially proper [removal and disposal of gloves](#).
- If at any time a member of a research team is presenting with COVID-19 symptoms or feeling ill, the individual should immediately report this to the supervisor and the researcher should stay home and self-isolate.
- Should a member of the research team present with COVID-19 symptoms, be tested for COVID-19 or have been exposed to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 the researcher should immediately report this to the supervisor.
- Researchers must regularly wash their hands according to PHO guidelines including when they enter and leave a research facility, and when returning home at the end of the day.
- All common areas and surfaces used by research teams should be cleaned regularly as well as at the start and end of each day. Cleaning and disinfecting information can be found [here](#).
- Be prepared for the possibility of core research facilities and other fee-for-service resources being unavailable.
- Be prepared for potential delays in supply chains related to research equipment and reagents, including shortage of Personal Protective Equipment.
- Be prepared for delays in services provided by vendors.
- Make sure all research data and files are accessible remotely. Please ensure that all privacy regulations are respected.

Last updated: February 2021

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- Think carefully before initiating new experiments or research projects: consider the time required to complete them as well as the cost and inconvenience if they were interrupted before completion. Also, consider the potential need to engage with research partners, including human participants, so plan accordingly. Where appropriate, revisions to research certification applications (i.e. Research Ethics approvals) may need to be completed.
- If needed, request internal research grant funding period extensions by writing to the VPR indicating the need for an extension.

Research Involving Human Participants

- The UNBC Research Ethics Board (REB), Research Ethics BC (REBC) and the Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of research have been providing direction on human participant research, including guidance on requirements for informed consent in research during a pandemic, modifications for interview-based research and other pertinent research considerations. Pandemic specific updates and resources can be found [here for UNBC, and here for REBC](#). An amendment must be submitted to the REB for any proposed changes to a research project involving human participants. In the event of eliminating immediate hazards, submit changes made to the research project as soon as practicable.
- Consider the possibility that when in-person interviews are possible under the direction from the Provincial Health Officer, interviewees may not be comfortable with committing to in-person interactions.
- It is also possible that should infection rates increase, pandemic management directives may become stricter again. Timing and duration of your planned interviews, therefore, is an important consideration. Documented options that participants could exercise in relation to the pandemic management directives would benefit participation rates.

Research in Communities

- General guidelines on safety while working in communities should continue to be followed; draft guidelines can be found [here](#).
- Consider the location of the planned research. Some First Nations are restricting travel within their communities and traditional territories.
- Any interactions within a community for the purchase of fuel, food and supplies should be kept to a minimum.

Field-based Research

- Supervisors need to include a COVID-19 risk assessment as an addendum (or in the “Project Specific Hazards not listed” section) to their normal Risk Assessment Plan which must be completed and submitted to the Risk and Safety Office, and the Office of Research: <https://www.unbc.ca/sites/default/files/sections/safety/riskassessmentplanningformfillableaug2015update.pdf>
- The document “[Protecting Employees, Contractors, Employers Working in the Silviculture Sector During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)” provides a comprehensive resource that UNBC recommends for helping prepare your COVID-19 Risk Assessment plan, especially the sections on physical distancing and transportation of employees.
- Researchers who commute from their home to the field each day should minimize their contact with other researchers using physical distancing, cleaning and other protocols as mentioned above. Keep in mind the restrictions regarding gatherings.

- When possible, continue to work from home and limit your presence in research facilities and in common work spaces on campus.

Lab-based Research

- If you are working in your lab/workshop, you must conduct a risk assessment of the area, using the [Exposure Control Plan Checklist \(pdf\)](#) which is to be sent to the Safety Office so that occupancy levels can be determined.
- Maintain a two-meter separation between active work areas, and follow all personal hygiene recommendations from the Provincial Health Officer.
- Masks must be worn while working in UNBC labs.
- Hand sanitizers and/or wipes should be available for all shared equipment.
- Researchers working alone in the lab should provide the Risk and Safety Office with a plan that outlines the timeline and activities to be undertaken.

Supporting Resources

Please refer to the [UNBC website](#) for information specific to UNBC employee health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[BC Centre for Disease Control.](#)

REBC: Resources for research ethics during a public health emergency [here](#).

WorkSafeBC provides an exposure control plan guide [here](#).

WorkSafeBC, COVID-19, What workers should do: <https://www.worksafebc.com/en/about-us/covid-19-updates/health-and-safety/what-workers-should-do>

COVID-19 resources translated into various languages are available from:

HealthLinkBC: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-feature/coronavirus-disease-covid-19>

BCCDC website: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/about-covid-19/translated-content>