FAQs for Research During the Safe Start Time Period: Phase 2 for Reopening (archived 1.25.2021)

Which researchers at the University of Washington should stay home during Safe Start: Phase 2?

- Researchers whose in-person research is allowable under the Governor’s Safe Start Plan: Phase 2 for reopening the state (see Returning to In-Person Research: Decision Tree) may spend time at their workplace once their research group’s plan is approved, but that time should be kept to a minimum, and all other research work that can be done at home (such as planning, data analysis, etc.) should be done at home. Special restrictions are still in place for certain types of research, which supersede other allowances. At this time, even if your research may be eligible based on the guidance above, it is still restricted under these human subjects, travel, and fieldwork directives (see: UW Fieldwork Health and Safety Plan (COVID Return: Phases 1-2) and Returning to In-Person Research Involving Fieldwork: Decision Tree). In general, research personnel involved in in-person work need to be designated “critical personnel,” and should be identified in your Return to In-Person Research Plans. In Phase 2, non-critical personnel may return to worksites if work can be performed safely and is absolutely necessary to maintain unit operations, or if they are unable to perform their work effectively at home. Such personnel must be noted in the Return to In-Person Research Plans and approved by the Department Chair or equivalent. In addition, some critical on-site research functions must continue, such as maintaining animals, taking care of sensitive equipment, and monitoring for safety. This work must also be carried out by designated critical personnel.

- Anyone who is sick must stay home. In addition, anyone experiencing symptoms that may be related to COVID-19 (fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, respiratory symptoms) should contact their healthcare provider and then notify the Environmental Health and Safety Department’s (EH&S) Employee Health Center at covidehc@uw.edu.

- Anyone who has been in close contact (less than 6 feet for more than a few minutes) with a confirmed COVID-19 case must stay home for 14 days since their last contact with that person. If someone showing symptoms or self-isolating is designated as critical personnel, an alternate must be identified.

What in-person* research is allowable under the Governor’s Phase 2 for reopening the state directive?

*in-person refers to an in-person, face-to-face, and/or facility-based activity.

In general, all research must be carried out while maintaining social distancing of 6-feet at all times, but some exceptions are possible. It is your responsibility to ensure critical tasks not possible to be performed while maintaining the current 6-foot separation requirement are reviewed and approved by the unit head or designee, and consult on enhanced safety protocol with EH&S as needed. See information at this link and see the checklist on the University of Washington COVID-19 Prevention Plan for the Workplace on the EH&S
COVID-19 Health and Safety Resources webpage. Other restrictions apply, see an approved Checklist for Developing a Return to In-Person Research Plan and the Returning to In-Person Research: Decision Tree for more information.

Note: Restrictions on research subject to human subjects restrictions, on fieldwork (see: UW Fieldwork Health and Safety Plan (COVID Return: Phases 1-2) and Returning to In-Person Research Involving Fieldwork: Decision Tree), and on research requiring travel are also in place.

1. Areas of research previously allowed (still allowed):

- Research that will help deal with the pandemic.
- Public health research.
- Research that has the potential to lead to therapies to treat human health problems.
- Research that will help the nation recover after the pandemic eases.
- Research involving long-term experiments, or maintaining vital equipment, cell lines, animals, and other time-sensitive research items, for which a pause would cause undue harm and/or cost.
- Some areas of research that involve human subjects, travel, or fieldwork that are already allowed. Please check the links above for more information and for additional allowable research that will be announced in the next few weeks.
- Research involving long-term experiments, or maintaining vital equipment, cell lines, animals, and other time-sensitive research items, for which a pause would cause undue harm and/or cost.

2. Newly added areas of research as of Phase 1:

- All areas of research that are required to meet an upcoming deadline.
- All facilities that support research, if the support cannot be carried out remotely.

See this Office of Research document, Returning to In-Person Research: Decision Tree to assist researchers in determining whether their in-person research is allowed.

How will research personnel of any type (students, postdocs, staff, faculty) be paid if their work cannot be done remotely?

We expect those instances will be rare, given the nature of inquiry and the authority you have to exercise flexibility within the research enterprise. Our goal remains to keep as many employees working, paid and connected to UW benefits as we possibly can during this disruption.

Post Award Fiscal Compliance has published a webpage titled, “Salary Expenses - Disruptions due to COVID-19” with guidance and FAQs reflecting current UW policy on charging salaries to research awards when work cannot be conducted on the award due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This information is evolving and will be updated as necessary.

I have reviewed this guidance, including the decision tree below, and I am still not sure my research qualifies. Who can I ask?

Send your question to research@uw.edu with the subject line COVID-19 and we will reply as soon as possible.

At this point, the decision to keep a laboratory open should be made by the PI, be based on the decision tree found in the document, Returning to In-Person Research: Decision Tree, and approved by your department.
chair or director, College or School. Depending on your local requirements; be certain to check those local requirements. For information about how the Decision Tree interacts with the specific criteria for continuing human subjects research, see this link.

I am unsure about my responsibilities for conducting fieldwork. What specific guidance do I need to follow?

Am I allowed to do fieldwork, or carry out work in a remote location other than my home?

Check with your unit for their advice and go over these documents: UW Fieldwork Health and Safety Plan (COVID Return: Phases 1-2), Returning to In-Person Research Involving Fieldwork: Decision Tree, and the EH&S: COVID-19 Quarantine and Testing Risk Framework for Field Work (new resource added 7/10/20) regarding guidance for carrying out field work. In general, if your research falls into one of the allowed categories, your travel is local, the travel can be carried out safely, you feel comfortable carrying out that travel, AND you can stay 6 feet away from all others both during the travel and during the fieldwork, the work would be allowed. For field work involving longer travel and/or conditions that require some time at less than 6 ft distance, more restrictions will be in place. Please refer to the guidance noted above.

Do I need to fill out every section of the Field Health and Safety Plan for my fieldwork?

It depends on your research. Not all elements of this plan are appropriate for all fieldwork. Local fieldwork with no overnight stay will not require as many elements as fieldwork with extensive travel and/or multiple overnight stays. Please consult your local unit requirements if you are unsure which apply to your fieldwork.

I need to drive to a local estuary to obtain some water samples, and I need a coworker to come with me to help. What parts of the Field Health and Safety Plan do I need to fill out?

First, be sure there is no way the samples can be collected safely by one person. If single person work is not possible, then because the work is local, involves same day activities, and only involves one other person, the Plan can be streamlined. These sections are important: Site Information, Attestations of Health, Activities Equipment and Supplies, and Personal Protective Equipment. Be sure to look through the other sections to be certain you have thought through any relevant issues noted there. Social distancing should still be practiced. If that is not possible, you need to propose protective measures in your Field Health and Safety Plan, which must be approved by your Department Chair or equivalent. You must minimize the time spent at less than 6 feet of distance and minimize the number of people involved. Face coverings and increased hand-washing/hand gel application is necessary. UW’s Department of Environmental Health and Safety is available to provide advice on working safely at less than 6 foot distances, as necessary.

Remember, when interacting for significant time periods with more than one person at under 6 foot distance, if anyone is diagnosed with COVID-19, the entire team will need to self-isolate for two weeks. Thus, it is important to institute a high level of protection.

Note that it is important to ensure you have permission to take samples and that you know the local COVID-19 related requirements.

My fieldwork involves going into a local community and interacting with individuals. Is this work allowed, and do I need to fill out the Field Health and Safety Plan?

Such work may be allowed, subject to guidance by the UW Human Subjects Division (HSD). Completion of HSD’s “CHECKLIST for Human Subjects Research during the COVID-19 Pandemic” is required.
My fieldwork requires me and my team to work with heavy equipment that requires multiple people to be closer than 6 feet of distance. Is this allowed?

If your work requires you to be less than 6 feet of distance, you need to propose protective measures in your Field Health and Safety Plan, which must be approved by your Department Chair or equivalent. You must minimize the time spent at less than 6 feet of distance and minimize the number of people involved. Face coverings and increased hand-washing/hand gel application are necessary. UW’s Department of Environmental Health and Safety is available to provide advice on working safely at less than 6 foot distances, as necessary.

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I am participating in fieldwork on a cruise, and I will be required to observe the ship-mandated protocols before, during, and after time on the ship. Do I also need to fill out the UW Field Health and Safety Plan?

No, it is sufficient to provide the ship’s protocols in writing to your Department head or equivalent for approval, if the ship’s protocol has the same information as required in the UW field safety plan. If not, supplement the ship’s protocol with any additional required information where possible. If this fieldwork involves international travel, you must apply for a waiver through the Office of Global Affairs. Such waiver requests must adequately justify why the research is critical, why it cannot be delayed, and include health and safety protocols to be followed.

I have heard that in order to carry out fieldwork on a ship, it is necessary to quarantine for 2 weeks and then be tested before boarding. Does the UW require the same?

Those embarking on a cruise with a UNOLS vessel must adhere to the UNOLS quarantine and testing requirements. For other research cruises, while UW does not require them at this time, quarantine and testing are highly recommended for any research cruise of significant duration. EH&S is in the process of developing requirements and guidance on this topic. Of course, all requirements under which the ship will be operating for the cruise, including the ship’s protocol, must be met.

Our fieldwork is carried out at a different site by personnel we hire who are already at that site. Since there is no travel involved to the site, do I need to fill out a Health and Safety Plan?

Yes, you need to consider the health and safety of those personnel. They must follow and be trained on University and all local requirements. The requirements and training must be documented. In addition, if they are UW employees, they must carry out the required daily symptom attestation in Workday or via other acceptable means as determined by HR. Information on symptom monitoring is listed on the UW Guidance for Symptom Monitoring for COVID-19. If they are not UW employees, you must have them attest each day in a written format on paper, email or an online survey. If the field site is not their usual workplace and they must travel to the field site itself, then that travel needs to be addressed in the Health and Safety Plan. If the fieldwork involves time on a boat, additional considerations should be addressed, including the safety of the crew, cleaning and disinfection schedules, PPE, procedures for responding to illness developed after boarding, and social distancing.

I need to carry out fieldwork on day trips in a small boat. What precautions should I take?
Please see the EH&S guidance, COVID-19 Prevention Guidelines for Small Boat Operations.

Updated “Background” for the Mitigating Impacts to Research Activities due to COVID-19 (archived 1.20.2021)

- The background was edited to include the announcement and link to the Governor’s guidance titled, “Healthy Washington–Roadmap to Recovery”

Background

**[Updated 1.20.2021]** On March 23, 2020 Governor Inslee issued a “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” proclamation strengthening mandates already in place to encourage social distancing, a crucial measure for slowing the spread of COVID-19. The Stay Home, Stay Healthy directive took effect on March 25. The University of Washington’s COVID-19 Safe Start Status is now Phase 2 of its COVID-19 recovery, in accordance with Washington’s Safe Start plan. Non-critical personnel may return to worksites if work can be performed safely and is absolutely necessary to maintain unit operations, or if they are unable to perform their work effectively at home. Lab and practicum courses with physical distancing and safety protocols may be offered in-person.

Updated Background for: Guidance for Returning to In-Person Research (archived 1.20.2021)

**[Updated 1.20.2021]** On March 23, 2020 Governor Inslee issued a “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” proclamation strengthening mandates already in place to encourage social distancing, a crucial measure for slowing the spread of COVID-19. The Stay Home, Stay Healthy directive took effect on March 25. The University of Washington’s COVID-19 Safe Start Status is now Phase 2 of its COVID-19 recovery, in accordance with Washington’s Safe Start plan. Non-critical personnel may return to worksites if work can be performed safely and is absolutely necessary to maintain unit operations, or if they are unable to perform their work effectively at home. Lab and practicum courses with physical distancing and safety protocols may be offered in-person.

Working Remotely (archived 6.22.2020)

- Even with the new directive from the Governor, many in your research group may or should be working at home, if feasible, carrying out work such as data analysis, literature review, manuscript writing, or proposal and progress report writing. All meetings, including journal clubs, must continue to take place remotely. All students, post-docs, staff, and faculty involved in research projects should have access to information they need to carry out work remotely, such as access to literature, access to existing datasets and research-related files, and access to meeting software (such as Zoom).
- Discuss any new plans with each member of your research team; it may be useful to have a regular remote check-in on weekly plans and progress for those working remotely. ASEs are allowed to have their work reassigned, to allow them to work at home (see HR policy and advice).
- We recognize that this is a highly challenging time, with many juggling childcare and logistics issues in addition to remote work. HR has developed a set of resources to provide solutions for most child care challenges: UW Emergency Baby and Kid Sitter Network and UW HR Working During COVID-19/ Child
Care. Options exist to help either with identifying low-cost or no-cost options, and HR personnel are available to help you determine your best options.

- Remember to be as accommodating as possible for the members of your research team; each person will have unique circumstances. Regular and frequent communication is key for your research group.

Critical Personnel (archived 6.22.2020)

Critical employees are designated to come to work **physically if work cannot be performed via telework and work can be done safely.**

Only critical personnel are allowed to come to their usual work location. For research, critical personnel are those who are involved in carrying out approved research and in addition, those who carry out specific critical functions, such as maintaining critical equipment, caring for animals, monitoring safety issues, etc. that require them to come to their usual work location. Note that critical personnel designations and continuity plans should be updated as situations change. Please work with your department administrator or an equivalent administrator to identify such personnel.

The essential personnel designation is invoked when the University is in suspended operations, which is not currently the case. While our current “essential” designations may be informative, they may also be insufficient to respond to COVID-19 specifically. Essential personnel are required to work at their usual location, but others are allowed to do so. In our current operations, as noted above, critical personnel are employees who are critical to the operation of their unit – including research – and must perform at least some of their duties on-site.

Locked Buildings (archived 6.22.2020)

UW buildings have moved to a locked mode, similar to on weekends or holidays, so if you have critical personnel identified, they will still have access if you meet the guidelines described above. Your building coordinator should have developed plans for deliveries and emergency access. You will need to call ahead for access to recharge facilities that are in a different building. Note that some of these facilities are curtailing hours and/or services, so it is wise to check in advance.