FAQs for Research During the Stay Home, Stay Healthy Time Period

Note: this is a rapidly evolving situation. The answers below represent our best understanding at this time and will be updated as circumstances warrant.

GENERAL TOPICS

Why is the UW allowing research to occur? Aren’t we all supposed to stay home?
Governor Inslee specifically acknowledged the importance of research to combat this crisis and recover from it, and therefore provided provisions for universities to continue to conduct critical research with restrictions. Many UW employees deemed critical to the University’s operations are still working in-person under this directive – practicing appropriate social distancing and other safety techniques – as they staff critical functions, such as our medical enterprise, facilities, and support systems for online learning. That is the case for other sectors as well, such as transportation, energy, and telecommunications, to name a few. Of course, restrictions to ensure social distancing apply in all of these cases.

The impacts of this crisis are vast and deep across our city, our country and the world. We do not know all the areas of research that will be critical for battling the pandemic or for recovering from it, but we do know many will have a role to play. Some areas of research may not be obvious now but should be considered for continued operations. Our research is funded largely from taxpayer dollars, and we have a responsibility to the state and the nation to help in any way we can, both for the current crisis and for the upcoming recovery. It is critical that we balance the need to reduce the number of people coming to their places of work with the need to support the state and the nation. The University requires that all research groups practice social distancing by ensuring research employees who can perform their work at home do so. Only those whose presence in-person is deemed critical to maintaining operations will come to their place of work, and for those who do, strong precautionary measures for social distancing are required. If we all work together on these goals, we will be able to meet this challenge.

Please see the list of examples of research that are permitted under the Stay at Home, Stay Healthy proclamation.

Are we now under suspended operations?
No. The University has not declared “suspended operations” and there is currently no intention to do so. A suspension of operations is generally invoked when there are physical challenges that make the campus unsafe, such as snow and ice. As a reminder, the University never closes.

Instead, for the COVID-19 crisis, we have transitioned to what we are terming restricted operations and operate in accordance with orders from the Governor and public health agencies.

What is the difference between “essential personnel” and “critical 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, critical personnel are employees who are critical to the operation of their unit – including laboratories – and must perform at least some of their duties in-person. Only critical personnel are allowed to come to their usual work location, and not stay at home. For research, critical personnel are those who are involved in carrying out critical 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 need to be in place by end of day, March 25 under the Governor’s proclamation, as already mentioned in the recent message on “Stay Home, Stay Safe” impacts to research. However, since situations change, it is expected there may be updates.

How is the UW safe-guarding research personnel?
Our first priority is to keep our community healthy and safe. Follow the required safety standards:

- Employees who are sick must stay home.
- All employees who can telework or work from home without impacting critical operations must do so.
- Employees who must come to work to maintain critical operations need to adhere to appropriate social distancing and safety standards which include:
  - Social distancing of at least 6 feet
  - Frequent laboratory decontamination procedures
  - Personal safety with appropriate personal protective equipment and frequent hand-washing

What is the time period of the Governor’s Stay Home, Stay Healthy directive?
The Governor’s directive is in effect from 5 p.m. Wednesday, March 25 until 5 p.m. Wednesday, April 8, but may be extended.

TOPICS REGARDING DECISIONS TO RAMP DOWN OR SHUT DOWN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

[UPDATED 3/31/2020] Do I need to stop doing research that I am currently carrying out at home?
No. The Governor’s directive only applies to activities that involve researchers (or to individuals participating in some human subjects research) leaving home.

[UPDATED 3/31/2020] What areas of in-person research are allowed?
A list of categories of allowed research areas is listed here.
Note that certain types of human subjects research are not allowed. Be sure to check this link for that information. See this link for an explanation of how these two sets of criteria interact.

What conditions must be met for me to carry out in-person research?
All three of the following conditions must be met for you to continue in-person research:

1. Your research falls under the allowable categories
2. You are able to follow the required safety standards:
   - Social distancing of at least 6 feet
   - Frequent laboratory decontamination and disinfection procedures
   - Personal safety with appropriate personal protective equipment and frequent hand-washing
3. Personnel are available and willing to carry out the work

Note that certain types of human subjects research are not allowed. Be sure to check this link for that information.

What safety precautions must be taken for me to carry out in-person research?

- Social distancing of at least 6 feet
- Frequent laboratory **decontamination** and **disinfection** procedures
- Personal safety with appropriate personal protective equipment and frequent hand-washing

Note that certain types of human subjects research are not allowed. Be sure to check this link for that information.

**I don’t work directly on COVID-19, how do I know if my area of research is allowed?**

Allowed research includes all areas that are potentially valuable to responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and/or potentially useful to recovery efforts. Many such areas may not be obvious now but should be considered for continued operations. You may wish to consider the Population Health areas as a useful framework for assessing areas that might be appropriate. The Office of Research has posted information to help you assess this issue. Note that certain types of human subjects research are not allowed. Be sure to check this link for that information.

**Should I shut my lab down completely?**

Even if your research area is allowable, if you feel that the best course of action for the safety of your research group is to ramp down your research activities or shut them down entirely, you should do so. You are not required to keep your research activities open. If you do ramp down or shut down, please see the Research Shutdown Checklist for helpful guidance. If the effort and/or cost of completely shutting down is significant, you may consider ramping down to a minimal level. The goal of the Stay Home, Stay Healthy directive is to minimize the amount of close contact between people for the next two weeks, so you should keep that goal in mind as you make such decisions. In addition, you must be able to follow these safety conditions:
- Social distancing of at least 6 feet
- Frequent laboratory **decontamination** and **disinfection** procedures
- Personal safety with appropriate personal protective equipment and frequent hand-washing

**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. In general, if your research falls into one of the allowed categories, and you can travel safely, and 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.

**I work on COVID-19 related research. Can I require my research personnel to come in to my laboratory to carry out this research?**

No research personnel may be **required** to come to campus or to their usual work location or go into the field, **unless** they are deemed critical personnel and their presence in-person is required to maintain critical operations. All other research personnel must be given the option to work remotely for the next two weeks, even if their job involves work on COVID-19 related research. Note that any research personnel who plan to come to their usual work location need to be designated as critical personnel, part of a list you provide to your unit administrator.

**I have sensitive equipment that needs daily maintenance. Can I come in to do this work?**

Yes, if you have been designated as “critical personnel” by your supervisor to carry out this work, and you follow the safety conditions:
- Social distancing of at least 6 feet
- Frequent laboratory **decontamination** and **disinfection** procedures
- Personal safety with appropriate personal protective equipment and frequent hand-washing

**I run a facility that processes samples and carries out other services that may be of importance for COVID-19 related research. Can I keep my facility open, if it requires me or one of my staff to come into the facility?**
Yes, if you have been designated as “critical personnel” by your supervisor to carry out this work and you follow the safety conditions:

- **Social distancing** of at least 6 feet
- Frequent laboratory **decontamination** and **disinfection** procedures
- Personal safety with appropriate personal protective equipment and frequent hand-washing

### Does the new directive change the already announced restrictions on human subjects research?
No, those restrictions are still in place. Please look at the restrictions for [human subjects](#).

### If I work with animals, will I be able to continue my research?
If your work meets the allowable conditions, animal research is still being supported. Please read this document that details allowable areas of research and provides a decision tree to determine whether your research meets the conditions for continuation. If so, you must be able to follow the safety conditions:

- **Social distancing** of at least 6 feet
- Frequent laboratory **decontamination** and **disinfection** procedures
- Personal safety with appropriate personal protective equipment and frequent hand-washing

Note that one of the areas of critical duties involves the care and well-being of animals used for research. Even if you are not actively carrying out research on animals, if you are responsible for their care and well-being, you must have designated critical personnel for that purpose.

### I have sponsor-required deadlines and milestones. What can I do if I am not allowed to carry out the required research?
Most sponsors (including NIH, NSF, and DOD) are providing flexibility with deadlines and milestones. Check the [Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) homepage](#) for general information on contacting sponsors related to COVID-19 impacts to your research. For specific sponsor policies, please see the [OSP announcements page](#) for recent sponsor information. If your sponsor is not listed, reach out to your sponsor for guidance.

### What facilities are open to support my research?
As of this time, all central research support offices are functioning remotely (e.g. OSP, HSD, GCA, ORIS, OAW, EH&S). Recharge or cost center facilities that support research are assessing their situation on a case by case basis. Please contact them directly. Most are listed along with contact information on a searchable site [here](#).

### Will I be able to submit proposals through OSP?
Yes, all those eligible to submit proposals under usual conditions can continue to submit proposals. OSP is working remotely, accepting proposals through [SAGE](#) and carrying out review and submission.

**[UPDATED 3/31/2020]** Can I still carry out human subjects research?
Some human subjects research is still possible, but restrictions exist. Please read more about this topic [at the Human Subjects Division’s website](#). See this [link](#) for information about how the human subjects restrictions interact with the more general limitations on UW research.

### I need to finish experiments the next two weeks to meet my thesis deadline, and I have a job waiting for me. Can I go into my lab to get this work done?
Note that certain types of human subjects research are not allowed. Be sure to check this [link](#) for that information. For other research, this is allowed as long as you can follow the required safety conditions:

- **Social distancing** of at least 6 feet
- Frequent laboratory **decontamination** and **disinfection** procedures
- Personal safety with appropriate personal protective equipment and frequent hand-washing
I have a job lined up and have accepted it, but it requires that I submit the paper I am working on. Can I come into the lab to finish up a few experiments to meet that requirement?

Note that certain types of human subjects research are not allowed. Be sure to check this [link](#) for that information. For other research, this is allowed as long as you can follow the required safety conditions:

- **Social distancing** of at least 6 feet
- Frequent laboratory **decontamination** and **disinfection** procedures
- Personal safety with appropriate personal protective equipment and frequent hand-washing

[NEW 3/31/2020] I carry out research that meets the criterion for "critical", but for safety reasons, requires a minimum of two or more people to be in the laboratory. How can I carry out this research?

You must be able to carry out the critical research work with 6 feet distance between personnel. If that is feasible, and if two people are willing to come to the laboratory to carry out this critical research work, then it is allowed. If 6 feet distance is not possible due to the safety requirement, you cannot carry out these experiments. Note guidance in the [Labs Working Alone section of the Lab Safety Manual](#) (p.29).

**PERSONNEL-RELATED TOPICS**

**Why aren’t all graduate students and postdocs required to be at home?**

Most are at home. Some graduate students and postdocs have been designated “critical personnel”, who are needed in-person to maintain critical equipment, care for animals, monitor safety issues, etc. They are required to carry out this work in-person. Anyone, including graduate students and postdocs, who is designated critical and directed by their supervisor to report to work, needs to report to work. However, if critical employees are in a high risk category or are concerned about safety, supervisors are asked to do their best to accommodate their employees without impacting critical operations. If accommodations are not possible, please contact central Human Resources for problem solving and support. No graduate student or postdoc will be required to come to their usual place of work during the Stay Home, Stay Healthy time period. Accommodations will be made.

**What should I do if my research mentor asks me to do something I don’t consider safe?**

Some units have a process in place for such situations, be sure to check first. In general, you should discuss this issue with your unit head (Chair, Director, or Dean) or the lead administrator of your unit. If this is not feasible and if you are in a Department, contact your Dean’s Office. If you are a member of a union, you can also contact your union representative.

**What if I have undergraduates in my laboratory? Can they still work on their research, if they are willing to do so?**

Certain types of human subjects research are not allowed. Be sure to check this [link](#) for that information. Note that some Schools, Colleges, or Departments may make local decisions about undergraduate research that are more restrictive. Be sure to check with your unit head about this.

For other research, undergraduates may carry out research remotely. If the research is critical, they may carry out in-person research, but only if they are deemed critical personnel. If they are deemed critical personnel, they must follow the required safety conditions:

- **Social distancing** of at least 6 feet
- Frequent laboratory **decontamination** and **disinfection** procedures
- Personal safety with appropriate Personal protective equipment and frequent hand-washing
In most cases these conditions could only be met if the student were already trained and semi-independent, in order to keep the 6 foot distance required.

**Can I take a 499 student into my laboratory for Spring Quarter research credits?**

Certain types of human subjects research are not allowed. Be sure to check this link for that information. Note that some Schools, Colleges, or Departments may make local decisions about undergraduate research for credit that are more restrictive. Be sure to check with your unit head about this.

For other research, undergraduates can carry out research for credit remotely. If the research is critical, they may carry out in-person research for credit, but only if they are deemed critical personnel. If they are deemed critical personnel, they must follow the required safety conditions:

- Social distancing of at least 6 feet
- Frequent laboratory decontamination and disinfection procedures
- Personal safety with appropriate personal protective equipment and frequent hand-washing

In most cases these conditions could only be met if the student were already trained and semi-independent, in order to keep the 6 foot distance required. In addition, a backup plan must be in place for the student in case situations change and in-person research is no longer allowed.

**How will I get paid if I am assigned to be doing lab work but I am required to stay at home?**

All opportunities for telework for non-critical staff should be explored and implemented. If you cannot telework, your unit should contact central Human Resources immediately to evaluate if you may be appropriate or eligible for reassignment to critical areas of work. If non-critical staff cannot telework and cannot be reassigned, units will work with central Human Resources to find a solution.

**[NEW 3/31/2020]** With regards to the exclusion for graduate students with a thesis defense in Spring Quarter, does the defense need to be already scheduled with the Graduate School, to qualify?

No. The student's committee needs to have agreed that the student is ready to defend by the end of Spring Quarter, but it is not necessary to have already scheduled the date with the Graduate School.