

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH CONTINUITY GUIDELINES – 03/19/2020

The information below is provided by the ODU Office of Research.

Research Continuity FAQs

Q. My research involves human subjects. May I proceed, provided I already have secured IRB approval?

All human research activity involving in-person interaction with participants must pause immediately. This requirement applies regardless of the IRB of record approving the ODU human research activity.

Safety is our priority. This action is being taken to decrease potential exposure to COVID-19 by our staff, faculty and others. PIs are encouraged to amend their protocol for online data collection if possible, but those amendments must be reviewed and approved by the IRB.

Q. May I begin a new line of research in my laboratory or in the field?

No new lines of research or experiments other than entirely virtual projects (i.e. those involving no in-person contact or those that can be carried out in a home office) should be initiated at this time. Faculty researchers may consult their dean's office for further guidance.

Q. How do I manage ongoing research projects?

Investigators should assess the status of current experiments and determine stopping points while taking the following steps:

- Ramping down in-laboratory or in-facility activities to essential functions;
- Performing as much work as possible by teleworking;
- Limiting the number of essential employees onsite; and
- Considering allowing lab or project staff to work in shifts.

Field projects that are externally-funded and that may have fewer social interactions or account for social distancing may be continued *pending* discussions with the grant sponsor and the Office of Research.

Safety is our priority. These measures are meant to protect the health of our faculty, staff and students, as well as our families, while still preserving your work.

Q. How should I prepare my laboratory for continuity of operations during this transitional period?

PIs should begin implementing the following before March 23rd:

Create a list of essential operations to continue ongoing research that would suffer a major impact if temporarily discontinued, such as loss of years of effort, data, or a major investment. Maintenance of essential equipment, safe standby mode in labs, essential samples, and animal populations also meets the criteria for essential operations. Examples of essential operations for projects include, but are not limited to:

- Maintaining the following: liquid nitrogen levels in storage tanks; ongoing animal experiments where stopping the experiment would compromise the project; and critical cell cultures; and
- Care and feeding of animals per IACUC standard operating procedures.

Q. How should I plan for staffing of my laboratory during this transitional period?

Plan for “PI + 2” staffing:

- To minimize risk of person-to-person transmission, labs should curtail in-lab or in-facility staff to the PI plus two additional staff members who are listed as essential personnel. More than 2 people can be designated as essential and can work in shifts. If essential operations include care and feeding of animals, the research personnel assigned to that task should carefully monitor announcements from the Office of Research.
- To facilitate this process, create a list of essential personnel who are required to maintain essential lab or project operations. Importantly, the designation of essential personnel should be made after discussion with these individuals and none should feel pressured to be listed or to come to campus. Non-essential personnel should not be present in the lab or in buildings where labs are housed unless given special permission.
- Deans/Associate Deans for research, or Department Chairs or Center/Institute Directors must sign off on minimal operations and staffing plans. Further, if these staffing plans include undergraduate students as essential personnel, approval from the appropriate Vice President will also be required.

Q. How do I best communicate critical information to my laboratory staff, including graduate research assistants?

Draft a communications plan for notifying lab personnel of these temporary changes to staffing. In addition, each lab or project should also have a notification chain to alert personnel of any changes to staffing.

During this period, please emphasize teleworking. Zoom accounts can be obtained so that group meetings can continue.

By Friday, March 20th, each lab or research group should:

- Provide a statement of operational plans to ramp down, outlining the list of minimal operations and identifying designated essential personnel who need lab or facility access to Department Chairs or Center/Institute Directors for their review;
- Notify personnel of these temporary changes to staffing and provide written notification to designated employees;
- Post the list of essential operations and personnel required to maintain those operations on the door of the lab or facility;
- Review contingency plans and emergency procedures with their group;
- Ensure that high-risk materials (radioactive material, biohazards, chemicals) are secured;
- Cross-train research staff to perform essential operations if primary personnel will be unavailable; and
- Consider documenting critical step-by-step instructions.

Q. How should I handle secure data during this transitional period?

While most PIs can take unsecured data off campus or place it in the cloud, that is not permissible with controlled data such as CUI and some export-controlled technical data. PIs should contact Adam Rubenstein in the Office of Research (arubenst@odu.edu) and/or David Flanagan at VMASC (dflanaga@odu.edu) for guidance.

Q. What other guidelines/best practices should I be communicating to my staff?

Ensure essential personnel are practicing social distancing in the lab or facility, washing their hands frequently, and cleaning high-touch surfaces such as door handles and light switches at least twice per day when personnel are in the lab or facility.

Request that they stay home if they are ill, with even minor symptoms, or if they have had contact with someone who is ill, especially with flu-like symptoms.