

Procedures for Field-Based Research Under COVID-19 **Updated June 18, 2020**

The purpose of this document is to outline procedures that help minimize the risk of COVID-19 disease transmission and protect the health and safety of personnel conducting field-based research activities. This document pertains to research activities that are “field-based” meaning those activities that occur off-Grounds, in community settings, or other buildings or locations not operated by UVA (e.g., schools, other universities, hospitals, community settings, public spaces). Please note that there are also site-specific procedures (discussed below) for UVA field station (e.g., Mountain Lake Biological Station, ABCRC). Please keep in mind that there may also be human subjects related issues to be considered in developing and implementing a plan for ramping up field-based research. Please review the following documents for additional details on human subjects research under COVID-19.

- See separate [guidelines](#) for clinical research
- See separate [guidelines](#) for Social & Behavioral Sciences

For research at a UVA field station, consult the site-specific instructions and requirements for each site: [Mountain Lake Biological Station](#); [Anheuser-Busch Coastal Research Center](#); [Blandy Experimental Farm](#). As directed, you will submit your research plan and information to these sites, consistent with the guidelines established below. For all other field-based research, a Field-based Research Safety Plan must be developed and reviewed by all University staff, graduate students, faculty, and personnel involved in conducting the research. Importantly, faculty, students, and staff must not be compelled to engage in travel or in-person research activities that they are not comfortable conducting during the COVID pandemic. The University’s lead faculty researcher/PI will inform their staff that they have the right not to engage in activities that could expose them to the public and obtain consent for their willingness to assume the risks involved.

No research can be conducted in the field until a Field-based Research Safety Plan has been prepared by the Research Team Leader/PI and approved by the Department Chair/Center Director, and Associate Dean for Research. A faculty member can submit a single Field-based Research Safety Plan on behalf of a research team, lab, research center etc. that covers multiple projects, including student-led projects, as long as all members of the research team (e.g., students, staff, faculty) are listed on the plan and have received training on how to implement the plan. For student-led projects not covered by a larger team’s plan, the Field-based Research Safety Plan should be submitted by the faculty advisor/mentor/supervisor. The plan should be submitted and reviewed using the VPR’s Office [on-line portal](#).

Elements of a Field-Based Research Safety Plan:

It is acknowledged that field locations vary considerably. As such, some of the safety procedures listed below may be more or less applicable across various applied settings. With this in mind, it is recommended that the Field-based Research Safety Plan be created to cover the following details and procedures as relevant to ensure the safety of all individuals involved.

1. List of all personnel (e.g., graduate students, postdocs, staff, faculty) including their contact information and an emergency contact.
2. Justification as to why delaying the research will have a detrimental impact on the project. This could include graduate students' progression toward a degree requirement resulting from the research or completion of sponsored projects or contracts.
3. Description of the research activities and what precautions are instituted to limit potential disease transmission (i.e., personal protective equipment [PPE], social distancing). See below and additional details in the VPR's [Research Ramp-Up Toolkit](#).
4. Contingency plan for carrying on research if one or more personnel becomes sick or is no longer willing to risk conducting the research. See details in the VPR's [Ramp-up Toolkit](#).
5. A copy of the Field-based Research Safety Plan and associated documents and work logs should be maintained in a shared space such that all project staff and personnel have access to the document, as revisions may be needed over time (i.e., UVA Box).

Approvals and Requirements:

1. Research being conducted at non-UVA sites must have written permission for the field work to proceed from those that control access to the field site (e.g., school, other university, hospital, community setting), to the extent that such an approval is relevant for the field-based research site. Please note that these sites may also have COVID related procedures that are required for accessing those sites, which should be addressed in the UVA Field-based Research Safety Plan.
2. If non-UVA agencies or research partners (e.g., other universities, subcontractors) are actively engaged in the research, the research must satisfy UVA standards detailed here.
3. A log of each day's activities should be created and stored in a shared folder (e.g., UVA Box). This log will include public or private locations accessed or visited, personnel in attendance, and any procedural or health related anomalies that may have occurred requiring assistance from persons outside the core field staff (e.g. mechanical issues, health issues).

PPE and Other Health-Related Precautions:

1. Each traveling investigator must complete UVA online COVID awareness and precaution training module (see [Ramp-up Toolkit](#)).
2. Before conducting research each day, all faculty, students, staff, and other personnel involved in the research project must complete the health screening through the VPR's online attestation process.
3. No one should participate in any fieldwork if they are feeling ill, have a temperature of >100 degrees Fahrenheit, or if any members of their household are experiencing flu-like symptoms. In such cases these individuals should, if possible, contact their primary care physician. Field stations may have established protocols for the use of local care options.
4. During fieldwork, masks should be worn at all times when within at least 12 feet of other people. Masks may be removed when working alone.
5. It is advised that a distance of at least 6 feet be maintained between all personnel and with any other non-project staff at all times. Consider bringing extra masks for other non-UVA personnel if they do not have masks.

6. The level and timing of disinfecting between uses of equipment should be determined by the project team. Separate equipment or materials should be made available for participants or others encountered in the field (e.g., tablet, writing instruments, copies of materials, handouts) so that they can be cleaned or disposed of after use. Upon the completion of the field-based research all equipment and materials must be disinfected.
7. If a member of the project staff presents flu-like symptoms the following steps are required:
 - a) The individual must cease fieldwork and self-quarantine. Contingency funds for a separate hotel room or other measures must be considered by the PI before research begins.
 - a) Seek COVID testing as soon as possible.
 - b) The remainder of the project staff may continue their work but must make extra efforts to isolate the project staff from external sources.
 - c) The individual can return to work if they test negative or are fever free for at least 14 days.

Travel-Related Considerations:

1. Travelers should drive separately to, from, and at the study site(s).
2. If the field-based research involves traveling out of state, written permission must be obtained by the Department Chair/Center Director and the Associate Dean for Research. See [UVA travel restrictions here](#).
3. If traveling long distances, stops should only be made for fuel and restrooms. Sanitize hands after these activities. All UVA personnel traveling should bring ample water/liquids, food, and masks/PPE for themselves in clearly labelled bottles and containers. No sharing of drinks, food, or masks/PPE will be allowed.
4. Remote fieldwork likely changes the risks of exposure to COVID-19 in positive and negative ways. Traveling to a remote work site often brings individuals from multiple locations to the same location enhancing risk when people arrive but limits external exposure after arrival. Individuals planning to participate in remote fieldwork, should self-quarantine as much as possible before traveling to the field site.
5. Project staff should establish field and travel protocols to maintain hierarchically isolated social groups that are maintained throughout field activities rather than mixing among groups. When space must be shared (e.g., sleeping quarters, dining areas, vehicles), mixing group membership should be minimized so that pairs or small groups that must share one sort of space limit commingling with others. Purchasing of food, supplies and contact with society outside the project staff should be limited to as few individual interactions as possible.
6. Shared housing and dining should be avoided whenever possible, or in accordance with hierarchical isolation above. For long-term field work requiring shared housing of longer than 2 weeks, cohabitating individuals may operate as a household after the initial 2 week period.

7. When group dining situations are unavoidable, distancing and protocols should follow state guidelines for restaurants. Outdoor dining is preferable in field situations whenever possible.
8. After returning from work at a field site or field location it may be necessary to remain isolated for a period of 14 days. Travelers should anticipate the need to “work from home” for this period and communicate accordingly with their supervisor.