



University of Pittsburgh COVID-19 Standards and Guidelines: Research Operations Prioritization

I. Purpose

This document details the University of Pittsburgh's (University) Standards and Guidelines on Research Operations Prioritization. These Standards and Guidelines are applied to each of the University's COVID-19 operational postures (High Risk, Elevated Risk and Guarded Risk). More information on these operational postures and their gating criteria can be accessed at the following website: <https://www.coronavirus.pitt.edu/operational-postures>.

The Standards and Guidelines outlined below are subject to change as deemed necessary by the Senior Vice Chancellor for Research recommendation to the University's Senior Leadership Team and approval of the chancellor. Communication about the University's current Standards and Guidelines will be announced and posted on the following website: <https://coronavirus.pitt.edu/>.

The University will always operate in compliance with federal, state and local health standards and restrictions, including [Pennsylvania Department of Health guidance](#). The University reserves the right to implement additional health standards and restrictions that reflect the needs of the University and the health, safety and well-being of its community.

As conditions and circumstances change, this set of Standards and Guidelines may need to be revised.

II. Scope

The Standards and Guidelines below apply to the entire University, including all University members and campuses.

III. Definitions

- A. Deep cleaning:** A level of cleaning that achieves "orderly spotlessness" as defined in the Association for Higher Education Facilities Officers (APFA) cleaning standards.
- B. Fieldwork:** Fieldwork is research in social sciences, natural sciences or the humanities that is conducted away from the home institution of the scholar. Disciplines in which it may be a critical element of the scholar's work include, but are not limited to, anthropology, archeology, astronomy, ecology, epidemiology, geology, history, language studies, linguistics, literary studies, oceanography,

psychology, sociology, social work, and many areas of zoology or botany. Some fieldwork is in remote locations, some is in U.S. or international urban areas (including work at libraries and archives), and some is remote work in national or international scientific facilities with health and safety guidelines comparable to those of the University of Pittsburgh.

- C. Personal protective equipment (PPE):** please refer to the [Face Coverings, Personal Protective Equipment, and Personal Hygiene Standard and Guideline](#) for the definition of this term.
- D. Research support and maintenance activities:** Activities that ensure the well-being of living collections as well as the periodic maintenance, care or supervision of equipment or infrastructure that cannot be powered down safely or whose continued operation is necessary to maintain another critical resource. Regarding living collections, the Division of Laboratory Animal Resources (DLAR) is responsible for animal husbandry of vertebrate animal colonies, while Principal Investigators (PIs) are responsible for the care of invertebrate animal colonies, plant or microbial collections. Examples of equipment requiring maintenance include, but are not limited to, -80° C freezers, cell culture incubators, unique reagents, and equipment that relies upon refrigerants or consumables such as dry ice, liquid helium, helium, liquid nitrogen, nitrogen, carbon dioxide or other gases.
- E. Undergraduate researcher:** An undergraduate student hourly worker who is paid using grant or other sponsored research funds or who may have a fixed fellowship stipend rather than an hourly wage. For the purposes of this document, an undergraduate researcher *does not* include undergraduates working without compensation for academic credit, as uncompensated interns, or as participants in a federally approved work study program.¹

IV. Research Operations

The University will take all reasonable measures to protect the health and safety of the research workforce and others on campus, including limiting on-campus operating presence for research and for research support and maintenance activities as necessitated by operational postures as described below. This includes the University's oversight for all COVID-related health and safety criteria, including appropriate standards for PPE.

Any changes to research and scholarly operations will be conducted in phases that are informed by public health authorities' loosening or tightening of physical distancing directives, the particular modes of work for each research group, and the University's operational postures. Field research will be governed by the [Standards and Guidelines for Fieldwork and Travel](#), which incorporate a risk analysis based on any restrictions on travel to the fieldwork site, local

¹ Other S&Gs or policies cover these undergraduate work cases: academic credit (follow rules and calendar for [Instruction](#)), uncompensated interns (follow [Off-campus Academic Experiences](#)), work-study (follow the rules and calendar established by the [Office of Admission and Financial Aid](#)), or student employees whose employment is not connected to academic credit or financial aid (see HR [Student Employment](#) site).

pandemic conditions at the fieldwork site and any quarantine requirements upon return to campus. This risk analysis may vary widely by field location.

Schools/campuses and departments should prioritize their research activities to mitigate impacts to early career researchers and research trainees working to complete degree or other training requirements, to the extent feasible. Schools/campuses and departments may need to customize access and procedures to enable research capacity, including longer hours of access, scheduling of personnel in asynchronous shifts, scheduling of operations in shared spaces or use of shared equipment and in cases where physical distancing cannot be maintained, consider use of enhanced PPE. The research operations should be analyzed within broad categories that include:

- Clinical research and clinical trials (interventional therapy trials, observational cohort trials, biospecimen and data collection trials);
- Other human research participants;
- Wet biological and pre-clinical biomedical labs;
- Use of animal facilities;
- Physical science, engineering or computing/media labs;
- Physical collections, including libraries; and
- Studio, performance and rehearsal spaces.

Each PI must develop and implement safety practices appropriate for operating their labs that are consistent with the [University's Health Standards and Guidelines](#), subject to review by their dean, director or regional campus president. Operation of the labs should align with any guidance or protocols outlined in the associated school's Activity Area Plan. All supervisors and staff must take the mandatory training in accordance with the [University's COVID-19 Training Standards and Guidelines](#).

PIs may have undergraduate researchers, graduate students or other trainees engage in active research as described by the [Office of the Provost](#). All trainees must review and affirm that they have read the [University's Health Standards and Guidelines](#) for working on campus before they begin work in any PI's lab. Trainees should be provided with information regarding whom to consult within their school or department should they have any concerns about working on campus. In most cases, this will be their associate dean for undergraduate studies for undergraduate researchers, their associate dean for graduate studies for graduate students or their school's [ombudsperson](#).

V. Research Operations Prioritization

The sections below outline the University's requirements regarding research operations within each functional area for each of the University's operational postures. These requirements assume adherence to all Standards and Guidelines on physical distancing, face coverings, screening, daily health checks and deep cleaning procedures. Users of animal facilities should consult with DLAR for information about animal facility operations under each of the University's operational postures.

A. High Risk Posture

Priority Research Activities (as described below) will continue in-person work when the University of Pittsburgh is in High Risk Posture. All other research or scholarly activity (e.g., planning, writing, literature review, remote data collection, data analysis, remote meetings, etc.) should continue remotely if possible. Other research or scholarly activity that cannot be carried out remotely may need to be scaled back to accommodate de-densification. In cases where protocols involving healthy research participants cannot be modified to implement remote monitoring or other approaches for safe data collection, research may need to be discontinued for the duration of the High Risk Posture.

Deans, institute directors and regional campus presidents will designate **Priority Research Activities** using the following criteria:

- Research on COVID-19 and other vital health sciences research targeting diseases with high morbidity and mortality;
- Work for which a stop or delay could cause harm to research participants' well-being;
- Work for which a stop or delay could cause harm to animal populations or other vital living collections;
- Work whose suspension would cause a critical loss of unique or irreplaceable materials or data;
- Management of equipment, instruments, or research infrastructure where the lack of maintenance could create damage or endanger safety; or
- Work for which a stop or delay would adversely impact critical national security efforts as described in DoD's [Defense Industrial Base Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce](#) memorandum or disrupt other essential critical infrastructure operations as described by the Director of the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency in the March 19, 2020 [guidance on the COVID-19 response](#).

B. Elevated Risk Posture

Research activities requiring in-person or on-campus work are permitted when the University of Pittsburgh is in the Elevated Risk Posture. Actions, including shift work, must be taken to limit the density of researchers in labs and other research spaces. Shift desynchronization with other laboratories on the same floor will potentially minimize interaction in hallways and communal areas. All other research or scholarly activity (e.g., planning, writing, literature review, remote data collection, data analysis, remote meetings, etc.) should continue remotely under the Elevated Risk Posture.

In the event of a transition from the Elevated Risk Posture to the High Risk Posture, all researchers will be immediately notified by their dean, director or regional campus president of the need to ramp down in-person work with expectation to return to remote work environment within 72 hours, except for work which meets the Priority Research Activities criteria.

C. Guarded Risk Posture

Research activities requiring in-person or on-campus work are permitted when the University of Pittsburgh is in the Guarded Risk Posture. Actions, including shift work, should be taken to limit the density of researchers in labs and other research spaces. Shift desynchronization with other laboratories on the same floor will potentially minimize interaction in hallways and communal areas. Research or scholarly activity that can be carried out remotely (e.g., planning, writing, literature review, remote data collection, data analysis, remote meetings, etc.) should continue remotely under the Guarded Risk Posture.

In the event of a transition from the Guarded Risk Posture to the High Risk Posture, all researchers will be immediately notified by their dean, director or regional campus president of the need to ramp down in-person work with expectation to return to remote work environment within 72 hours, except for work which meets the Priority Research Activities criteria.

In the event of a transition from the Guarded Risk Posture to the Elevated Risk Posture, PIs will re-instate actions, including shift work, taken to limit the number of researchers in labs and other research spaces to ensure they do not exceed the maximum allowable in the Elevated Risk Posture. Shift desynchronization with other laboratories on the same floor will potentially minimize interaction in hallways and communal areas.

VI. Related Authorities, Guidance and Resources

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) Guidance: Face Coverings](#)

[Pennsylvania Department of Health COVID-19 guidance](#)

[Process to Reopen Pennsylvania](#)

[University's COVID-19 Operational Postures and Gating Criteria](#)

[University's COVID-19 Standards and Guidelines: Shared Spaces](#)

[University's Department of Environmental Health and Safety Guidance and Use Case Scenarios for Face Coverings and PPE](#)

VII. Contact Information and Public Accessibility

This document is posted on the University of Pittsburgh COVID-19 Standards and Guidelines website and can be found at: <https://www.policy.pitt.edu/university-policies-and-procedures/covid-19-standards-and-guidelines>. For questions related to this document, please contact: researchcovid@pitt.edu.