

COVID-19 Resources and Guidance for Research Activities

April 7, 2020

Background

On March 19, 2020, Western announced that all Spring Quarter classes and instruction will be offered remotely in response to COVID-19 pandemic. On March 23, 2020, Governor Inslee declared a Stay-at-Home order that effective midnight on March 25, 2020, all non-essential businesses in Washington State shall cease operations except for performing basic minimum operations.

Even as many universities around the country close their research facilities and buildings, Western is doing everything possible to keep research programs open and productive, while also protecting the health and safety of our students, faculty and staff. To deliver those basic minimum operations, organizations must establish and implement social distancing and sanitation measures established by the US Dept. Of Labor and WA State Department of Health guidelines. The governor's order remains in effect until May 4, 2020.

Governor Inslee designated a list of [Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers](#) to help state, local, tribal and industry partners as they work to protect communities while ensuring continuity of functions critical to public health and safety, as well as economic and national security.

This document will provide guidance and resources specifically regarding research issues to help planning during this time when constraints due to COVID-19 are constantly evolving and changing how we conduct research.

Exempt Research

Research personnel can refer to the [Allowable Research Decision Tree](#) for help with deciding if their work falls under [Inslee's Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers list](#).

1. Critical activities necessary to maintain laboratory viability **can continue** while abiding by social distancing, personal protection and other required safety protocols. These activities include:
 - a. Research involving:
 - i. Long-term experiments for which a pause would cause undue harm or cost
 - ii. Essential work to meet thesis requirements for a final defense Spring Quarter
 - b. Work in an area of biological, biomedical research or public health research. These areas may include biological, biomedical, engineering, materials science chemistry or physics research, that can be reasonable justified as important for developing biotechnology-related therapies, defined as therapies to treat human-health problems.
 - c. Care for animals, plants and unique or expensive cell cultures or biological specimens
 - d. Maintaining equipment, (e.g. liquid nitrogen systems) that cannot be maintained remotely or shut down without significant cost or consequences to the research effort,

and/or

- e. Preservation of unique reagents and other expensive materials.

Research Guidance and Planning

Precautions

- **Stay home if you are ill.** If personnel experience symptoms including fever, cough or difficulty breathing, they need to stay home.
- **Maintain social distancing.** COVID-19 is spreading in our community. Ensure that research team members are able to arrange personal interactions to maintain a comfortable six-foot distance from each other. If it is difficult to maintain social distance due to crowding in a research facility, you will need to work out shifts and set up schedules so that the number of people working at any one time does not preclude the ability to keep social distance.
- **Frequent hand washing** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Hand sanitizer is not a substitute for hand washing in the laboratory. Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- **Clean and disinfect frequently and shared-touched surfaces daily.** This includes tables, lab benches, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, faucets and sinks. Contact Facilities Management for disinfectant wipes via a [Ready Request](#).

Personnel

At this time, there are no plans to restrict access to University research spaces, but it is wise for every research group to plan ahead in the event that full access is not possible for some time period.

- **Remote work whenever possible.** Everyone who can conduct all or some of their research remotely (by phone or online) should do so, effective immediately. For instance, analysis of results, design of future experiments, and the preparation of papers and presentations can be prioritized and conducted remotely. Staff and students should confirm their plans with their supervisor or faculty advisor via phone or email. Meetings should be held remotely, e.g., via Zoom, Teams or teleconference.
- **Minimize time on campus and communicate with supervisor.** Personnel, including graduate and undergraduate assistants, and student employees, should come to campus only with the approval of their faculty advisor or supervisor and only for the bare minimum time and exposure to others. Laboratory activities should be reduced to the bare minimum and programs and work schedules arranged to achieve social distancing within labs and buildings. To ensure safety, faculty or supervisors should inform the department chair who is approved to come to campus.
- **Individual judgement should be respected.** Anyone who does not feel safe in entering research spaces should not be required to do so. Simply share these concerns with your supervisor. They have been encouraged to be flexible and as supportive as possible.

Research Spaces

- **Safety first.** Safety guidelines should be followed at all times. Personnel should not work alone in laboratories and experiments should not be conducted if required staff expertise, i.e. consultation on high-risk procedures and emergency spill response, is unavailable. Communicate with your supervisor on the most appropriate times to perform this work.
- **Stagger work schedules to promote social distancing.** Work schedules can be modified to include shifts for smaller subgroups of personnel. Planning of these activities should be done remotely, rather than in person.

Plan Ahead for Possibility of Facility Shutdown

- **Delay in services.** Prepare for a significant drop in support services on which you depend. By thoughtful planning you may be able to minimize the long-term impacts on your research. These include but are not limited to Facilities Management services, EHS hazardous waste disposal, Scientific Technical Services, AMSEC, and stockroom services.
- **Preserve critical research data and samples.** Faculty and department chairs should plan ahead and prepare/archive data, samples, animal and plant models, equipment and other infrastructure for an extended and more extensive shutdown.
- **Post emergency contact information outside lab.** Faculty should update emergency contact information for their group and ensure that it is prominently posted outside and inside their laboratories and to their department chairs.
- For longer-term plans, please see the [Lab Emergency Closure Planning Checklist](#)