A Plan for Restarting University Research Activity

These guidelines are subject to change to align with directives from the Governor, NSHE UNLV Chancellor, and UNLV President.

On May 19, 2020 President Marta Meana discussed the plan to have the UNLV workforce start transitioning back to campus gradually – and in steps. This approach also applies to restarting university research activity. This document provides guiding principles in restarting university research activity.

UNLV has developed a COVID-19 Response Policy. The safety and wellbeing of every member of UNLV's community are paramount, and UNLV must remain vigilant in mitigating the impact of COVID-19. The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance for faculty and staff returning to the workplace as the university prepares for students to return to campus.

THREE STEP APPROACH

(Developed by UC Berkeley in partnership with VCRs/VPRs from the University of California system and the APLU, with contributions from many other institutions including UNR and UW)

COVID-19 self-monitoring is required for researchers who will be on campus.

Faculty and staff who will be on campus are required to self-monitor for symptoms of COVID-19. Before coming to campus, employees must take their temperature and self-screen through answering a series of questions as recommended by the Southern Nevada Health District (SNHD). The RebelSAFE Mobile App COVID-19 Assessment Tool may also be utilized to assist with self-monitoring. For additional information, please see Working During the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Steps and Permitted Research Activities.

Before allowing research and scholarly activities to resume or continue both on and off campus, a standard operating procedure (SOP) for the rigorous enforcement of social distancing is required and must be approved. The elements of the SOP should include a schedule/work-shift for researcher access, the required safety personal protective equipment (PPE), minimum distancing based on size of space and nature of activity therein, the maximum number of faculty allowed in office, the maximum numbers of individuals per lab unless further density is justified and approved, self-monitoring prior to work, and sanitization or disinfecting of common use areas, materials, benches or instruments utilized by multiple people.

PI Planning to Resume Activities

The development and approval of a safety-based SOP for restarting research (*see UNLV Restarting Research: Safe Laboratory Practices, UNLV Restarting Research: Safe Practices for Conducting Human Subjects Research, UNLV Restarting Research: Safe Practices for Conducting Field Research*) is required. The SOP will require approvals from the appropriate Department Chair and Dean before research activities can resume. Plans should be flexible to enable the swift ramp down of research to an earlier step in response to changing circumstances.

- Plans must comply with physical distancing requirements and should provide for the lowest density of people reasonable to carry out research, and gatherings, including group meetings, and even one-to-one discussions should continue to occur virtually. Read the UNLV COVID-19 Response Policy here.
    - Consider staggering work schedules to maintain low personnel density.

- Plans for cleaning/sanitizing labs and research work spaces prior to restarting work and after resuming activities must be established.
    - Research teams utilizing shared space must coordinate their plans. Cleaning and sanitization products should be purchased and maintained by the Principle Investigator (PI).

- Any personnel returning from out-of-state must follow current guidance on 14-day self-quarantine prior to reporting to campus – these individuals should work from their place of quarantine to the greatest extent possible if they are asymptomatic.

- PIs must first ensure/acquire an adequate supply of PPE before any activities can be resumed. The PPE should be defined in the SOP and ordered as soon as possible. PPE should not be shared in any way. PPE, such as gloves, should be discarded before exiting the lab or shared space. PIs are expected to purchase the PPE required for their research and scholarly activities.

- Non-critical research that generates large volumes of hazardous waste and/or necessarily involves chemical, biological, radiative or other hazardous materials will not be prioritized if the waste stream cannot be managed safely.

- Carrying out research or scholarly activities should be limited to UNLV employees and registered students – volunteers are not allowed to conduct research until Step 3 is reached.

- All restart planning must consider the needs of employees/students with current disabilities or those who will require new accommodations.

- SOPs need to address the consequences for not following mandated practices and identify who is responsible for the closing and reopening laboratories and multi-user space if safety practices are not followed. In VPRED facilities, managers, RMS, and the VPRED safety officer have the authority to stop work

activities when SOPs are not followed by PIs, workers, and students. RMS is the safety authority on campus and should be consulted by PIs when necessary or if there are questions.

Classification and Prioritization of Research Activities

Essential: These activities have continued without interruption and include maintenance of animal labs, protection of cell lines, fly lines, germ lines, and growth chambers, and access to vital computers and documents.

Critical: COVID-19 related rapid-response research activities.

Time-sensitive:

- Data collection or experiments close to completion in which a pause would lead to "catastrophic loss" of research results.
- Research activities for the completion of grants.
- Data collection associated with longitudinal studies.
- Experiments or studies close to completion, or those having affects on contingent experiments.
- The work of early career stage researchers, graduate student and postdoctoral researchers, particularly individuals close to completing their degrees/terms of appointment.
- Field research, with priority for seasonal data collection.
- College/School and Department Core Facilities that cannot be operated remotely.

All other types of on-site research, scholarly, and creative activities:

These activities will be prioritized on a case-by-case basis if the activities do not fall under the three criteria provided. The resumption of activities will be based on the approval of the appropriate Department Chair and Dean and the step of research activity in use.

Three Step Approach to Restarting Research

Any research or scholarly activities must be phased in gradually so that population density and safe practices can be monitored to ensure staff health and safety. Researchers who are members of vulnerable populations, primary caretakers of vulnerable individuals, and those without childcare should not restart research until Step 2.

PIs will be required to have SOPs outlining safety procedures for required PPE for researchers and cleaning procedures to sanitize research spaces, general use areas, and instrumentation accessed by multiple users on a regular basis for all steps. For additional guidelines, please review COVID-19: General Guidelines for Research Staff.

STEP 1: Continuation of essential and critical research activities/ Preparation for additional lab openings

Step 1 for research and scholarly activities will focus on preparing buildings and laboratories for a return to work. In this step, limited numbers of researchers will be allowed to come to campus to assess and open labs, or perform minimal high-value, low-risk work, as approved by their Department Chairs and Deans and with accepted SOPs for safe lab practices in place. Step 1 will begin with extreme caution, to allow the gradual rebuilding of the research enterprise at a measured pace. The goal is to minimize population density in our buildings.

STEP 2: Time-sensitive research activities (30-50% of research personnel on-site at any time).

Additional researchers may be allowed on campus to restart time-sensitive activities, as approved by their Department Chairs and Deans and with accepted SOPs for safe practices in place. PIs will utilize SOPs with the understanding that no more than 50% of the personnel should be in the laboratory, research space, or common space, and that social distancing is still required for the use of equipment and laboratory benches.

STEP 3: Gradual restart of research (50-100% of research personnel on-site at any time).

All other research and scholarly activity, as approved by Department Chairs and Deans and with appropriate SOPs for safe practices in place, may be allowed on campus following a staggered approach.

Requirements for Steps 1 – 3:

All research and scholarly activities must maintain the following:

1. Only personnel with a need to access physical locations to advance research should be on-site. Even those personnel should minimize time on campus.

All others should remain off-site to help maintain physical distancing until guidelines suggest otherwise. Meetings should still be conducted remotely. Each PI must think carefully about which lab members will be allowed to return to work initially:

- Ph.D. students and postdocs should be given top priority due to the need to complete their research projects in a timely fashion.
- Priority should be given to lab staff who have expressed a willingness to voluntarily return to the lab.
- Consider the urgency of the work: students or postdocs should be given high priority if they need to complete experiments to meet a thesis deadline, a paper submission, or a grant submission.
- Consider the rotation of personnel on a schedule to allow all participants research progress.
- Volunteers including undergraduate students will not be allowed in the laboratories for the duration of the pandemic.

2. Laboratories may not be authorized for access unless the following are defined and ready to be produced upon request by the Deans:
   a. The number of individuals that can be in a space at any given time.
   b. A clear process to ensure work shifts do not accidentally overlap.
   c. A listing of supplies provided to maintain safety and their storage location: face coverings, soap, hand sanitizers, cleaning materials, and first aid kits.
   d. Procedures to clean/wipe down shared items, equipment, carts, and work surfaces prior to usage by others.
   e. A process to maintain access and activity logs in order to trace contact should someone become sick with COVID-19.

3. Physical distance between people should be maintained at all times based on approved SOPs unless other safety precautions are adopted.
   a. Maintain a distance of at least 6 feet between people. Laboratories and facilities with limited space that cannot ensure that personnel will meet these public health requirements must remain off-limits. Some locations may choose to reconfigure interior space or work flow to relieve bottlenecks and maintain space between research personnel. Any space reconfiguration should include consultation with RMS and facilities management.
   b. Do not gather in groups of size that exceed what is permitted based on UNLV guidelines. Research ramp-up cannot result in crowded spaces or mass gatherings.

4. Laboratory/research staff must cover their mouth and nose with a face covering when around others and when moving through common spaces. The PI will determine in the SOP what type of PPE face coverings will be utilized and procure them for the research staff. The PI should also define how often the PPE would need to be replaced.

5. Laboratory/research staff must wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. They must also routinely and regularly disinfect common contact sites (e.g., keyboards, door handles, multi-user equipment, etc.) that they utilized for their research.

Additional Guidance for Human Subjects Research

The resumption of human subject research must be centrally focused on the health and safety of our faculty, staff, students, and human research participants. Researchers must attend to and acknowledge the particular circumstances and challenges encountered with the different university units as well as our community partners.

Principal investigators will be required to have SOPs outlining safety procedures in terms of social distancing, required PPE for researchers and participants, and cleaning procedures and frequency required to sanitize areas and instrumentation accessed by multiple users or research participants on a regular basis for all phases. For additional guidelines, please review COVID-19: General Guidelines for Research Staff.

The specific type of human subject research that will be able to be conducted during the re-opening of research at UNLV are categorized below. Whenever possible, delay face-to-face data collection, or consider remote data collection.

New research studies

If face-to-face research with human subjects is conducted, researchers must confirm and document subjects' verbal confirmation that they have not received a diagnosis of COVID-19 in the past fourteen days, do not exhibit any of the COVID-19 symptoms, and, to the best of their knowledge, have not come in close contact with a person who is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19.

For new face-to-face research with human subjects, researchers must complete the "Addendum for Face-to-Face Human Subjects Research." This form is available in the Forms and Templates section of IRBNet.

Existing research studies

Revising human research proposals to include required sanitization, verbal COVID-19 screening, use of PPE, and other safety precautions do not need to be formally submitted as a modification. However, if research procedures will be changed to accommodate COVID-19 (e.g., conducting activities online instead of in-person, or individually instead of in a group format), a modification to the protocol must be submitted and approved prior to initiation of those changes. Additionally, Informed Consent Forms should include a statement that the research activities will utilize accepted standards for mitigating the risks of COVID-19 transmission; however, the chance of transmission cannot be eliminated.

STEP 1: Distance or Remote Research

Observational and clinical research that can be conducted at a distance. Researchers may be allowed to come to campus to restart research activities, as approved by their Department Chairs and Deans and with accepted SOPs for safe research practices in place.

STEP 2: Time Sensitive Research with Appropriate Mitigation of Risk

In person research may begin when physical distancing can be maintained and when risk is mitigated to a minimal level. Research must be approved by the Department Chair and Dean with an accepted SOP for safe research practices.

Only a limited and strictly defined set of research activities involving human subjects research should be conducted face-to-face during Step 2. During the COVID-19 recovery period, all human subjects research should continue remotely where feasible. If face-to-face research with human subjects cannot be conducted remotely, minimize the risk by not conducting research on individuals in higher-risk groups or minors, and practice sanitation and hygiene processes at all times as specified by the Centers for Disease Control and other public health agencies. Research areas must be thoroughly disinfected in between visits. Social distancing must be maintained at all times, which may eliminate some research studies that require close physical interaction with human subjects.

STEP 3: Gradual Restart of Research (50-100% of research personnel on-site at any time)

All other research, as approved by Department Chairs and Deans and with appropriate SOPs for safe research practices in place may be allowed on campus following a staggered approach.

Additional Guidance for Field Studies

(Adapted from guidance provided by Texas A&M University and UC Berkeley and other APLU resources)

Conducting studies in the field will follow UNLV's 3 step approach. Researchers must request restarting field studies provided standard operating safety procedures (SOPs) are followed. The PI is responsible for defining safety SOPs for increasing activities in the field activities in low-density locations such as agricultural sites and nature areas. Both the Department Chair and Dean must approve the research activities based on the PI's SOP and the step approach. Similarly they will be responsible for prioritizing who can conduct research in the field and in what step. Field studies involving human subjects must procedures outlines in Additional Guidance for Human Subjects Research (page 7 of this document).

The following safety issues must be addressed in the request to restart field study work. Research will not be restarted if social distancing requirements cannot be met. Currently this includes no more than one person per vehicle when traveling to field sites. At a minimum any field studies must also ensure that interaction with members of the public is minimized. Criteria that must be addressed by the PI in SOPs for fieldwork:

- Define social distancing criteria that is being used, equipment handling, disinfection procedures, communication options in the field, check in procedures, and emergency procedures.
- Define PPE, provisions, and supplies for the team with a focus on limiting sharing of resources.
- Define the process for a team member refusal to participate and what job duties they will perform instead of the fieldwork. Team members should be able to opt out without fear of penalty if they feel conditions are unsafe.
- Define self-assessment protocols for members of the team to ensure safety. Each team member should be asymptomatic for at least two weeks prior to fieldwork and will not participate should they feel ill or have reasonable cause to believe they have been exposed to COVID-19.
- Define how reliable communication will be maintained by the team to ensure they receive updates or get assistance. There should be a defined frequent check-in schedule.
- Provide relevant public health requirements and campus policies regarding COVID-19 in the safety SOPs for the team.
- Define responsible conduct in the field, community; and how the team will minimize contact with the public during the field studies.

All research team members must be provided the SOPs and the PI should review safe work practices in the field and identify the goals and plans related to the work.

General Concepts and Guidelines

To ensure continuity in the approach to fieldwork resumption teams should utilize video meetings for training, planning, and general discussion regarding the work. These activities should minimize in-person interactions. Training is important for critical tasks to minimize time in the field, the size of teams, and possible exposure risks.

Social distancing will likely require that each team member utilize their own transportation to the research site. Likewise, the team should meet at a predetermined location that allows for social distancing at the site. In the event that social distancing requirements change and shared vehicles are allowed, vehicles should be wiped down with disinfectant prior to and after use. Team members in shared vehicles should wear proper PPE including face coverings if social distancing of 6 feet cannot be maintained.

Provisions should not be shared. Water, food, and snacks should be prepared and brought from home, if possible. Each team member should ensure they bring enough water for the conditions that they will encounter (i.e., two gallons per day). Each team member should have their own labeled cooler for their supplies. For overnight trips lodging should allow for team members to maintain social distancing (i.e., single rooms, single tents).

If fueling vehicles and stops are necessary, team members should maintain social distancing, be cognizant of what is touched, use disinfecting wipes on handles in the facilities or paper towels as a barrier, and use hand sanitizer before re-entering the vehicle.