

Gradually Increasing On-Campus¹ Research-Related Activities at Penn State

Dear Penn State Research Community,

With the rapidly evolving circumstances regarding COVID-19 and our focus on social distancing and the health and well-being of the community, the Office of the Senior Vice President for Research, in consultation with the Vice Dean for Research and Graduate Studies in the College of Medicine, has issued this revised guidance related to on-campus research.

Specifically, we will begin a gradual and phased increase in on-campus research-related activities in accordance with this plan. All research activities that can be continued remotely should continue in that manner. Principal Investigators must also be prepared to quickly reduce on-campus research-related activities if deemed necessary by the Senior Vice President for Research or other University executives.

The decision to transition from one phase to the next will be made by University Executives and aligned with the University's plan to Return to Work (in development). Testing, contact tracing, and the ability to quarantine will be critical in pacing our transition from one phase to the next.

College Deans, Institute Directors², Campus Chancellors, or their designees will oversee the research ramp-up process within their respective units. Deans and Institute Directors should share their approaches with the [Senior Vice President for Research](#); Campus Chancellors should provide their plans to the [Vice President for Commonwealth Campuses and Executive Chancellor](#) for approval.

The phases presented in this guidance are aligned with the [State of Pennsylvania's phases](#) of red, yellow, and green; however, the University may choose to be more restrictive if warranted. A transition phase (orange) from red to yellow has been included to allow preparation of our facilities prior to transition, and yellow has been divided into two phases to support a more gradual transition.

The underlying principles remain the same as when we reduced our on-campus research-related activities: to protect the health and safety of individuals and to keep our healthcare systems from becoming overwhelmed. Together, we need to do everything we can to balance on-campus research-related activities while protecting the health and safety of the research workforce and the broader community.

We must remember that COVID-19 is a very infectious and complex disease.

Scope

This guidance applies to researchers and research administrators at University Park, the Commonwealth Campuses, and the College of Medicine.

For members of our research community who work at the Applied Research Laboratory (ARL), please continue to follow ARL-specific guidelines, which allow for critical national security needs to be maintained while also maximizing social distancing and adopting remote working protocols.

In anticipation of this gradual increase in on-campus research-related activities, researchers are encouraged to continue directing personnel toward activities that can be completed remotely, such as analyzing data, writing research papers, developing grant proposals, and training your [graduate students](#) and postdoctoral fellows to do so as well. New

¹ Throughout this document, on-campus includes any university facility or field site. Research includes the scholarship of research and creative accomplishments as defined in academic policy AC23

² The Institute Directors for this plan are the five University Park Directors of the following Institutes: Huck, IEE, MRI, SSRI, and ICDS

proposals should include tasks that can be conducted remotely. Group meetings and one-on-one meetings should continue remotely.

Guiding Principles

- Protecting the health and safety of the research workforce and the broader community, emotional as well as physical, is paramount. We also have an obligation to protect the health and safety of our clinical patients, human-research subjects, and our local communities. [State](#) and [Federal](#) public health guidelines will serve as our guides.
- Granting access to on-campus research activities in a fair and transparent manner.
- Ensuring flexible approaches that accommodate the needs of vulnerable populations.
- Remaining adaptable, flexible, and nimble as the situation evolves. As we gradually increase research activity, we should be prepared to reduce activity to that of an [earlier phase](#), if and when needed.

On-campus research-related activities will be categorized according to one of the phases in Table 1. Several driving factors enable transition from one phase to another, and these will vary by campus and facility. We will also remain aligned with public health and state [executive orders](#). In-person activities must follow business and building safety orders provided by the CDC, the Commonwealth of PA, local governments, and the University. Researchers must manage expectations and recognize that it may be a long time before labs and facilities are fully occupied.

Testing, contact tracing, and the ability to quarantine will be critical in pacing our transition from one phase to the next. We must maintain a heightened awareness that with increased interactions, the number of COVID-19 cases may increase, and on-campus research activity may need to revert to an earlier phase.

Next Steps for Research Units (Colleges, Institutes, and Commonwealth Campuses) and Investigators

1. Unit leaders³ (College Deans, Institute Directors⁴, Campus Chancellors, or their designees) should create a prioritized and phased list of research-related activities that they expect to increase on-campus.
2. Unit leaders, in consultation with Return to Work guidance (in development), should develop options for vulnerable individuals, if any, including delaying their return to on-campus research until a later phase. This may include, for example, student populations, those with health concerns, and those with safety concerns.
3. Unit leaders, working with principal investigators and the unit's facility coordinator and safety officer, should develop a plan with a schedule and a checklist for an organized and phased transition, including
 - Create a [list of research personnel](#) for approval by unit leader and submit to EHS (for those individuals whose names have not already been submitted). Your [Facility Coordinator](#) will also need to complete the online space re-occupancy form.
 - Incorporate [State](#) and [Federal](#) public health guidelines. In-person operations must follow business and building safety orders provided by the CDC, the Commonwealth of PA, local governments, and the University.
 - Review [EHS guide for fieldwork](#), if applicable.
 - Complete the [EHS Research Ramp-up Checklist](#) for approval by unit leader and submit to EHS.

³ Throughout this document, unit leaders are College Deans, Institute Directors, Campus Chancellors, or their designees

⁴ The Institute Directors for this plan are the five University Park Directors of the following Institutes: Huck, IEE, MRI, SSRI, and ICDS

- Retain contact information for research personnel and review contingency plans and emergency procedures with the research groups.
 - Complete [form](#) for information on research or lab equipment that was taken home and that is returning to campus (if not already submitted).
4. Unit leaders and principal investigators should review [instructions for supervisors and individuals](#), which provides guidance on responding to reported cases (suspected or confirmed) of COVID-19 in their work units.
 5. Principal investigators should obtain prior approval from the relevant academic dean for undergraduates, external visitors, and visiting scholars to be conducting on-campus research-related activities.
 - Undergraduate researchers should follow the [student affairs policy](#).
 - Visiting scholars should follow [policy](#).
 6. Principal investigators should follow updated [guidance](#) on conducting research involving animals, if applicable.
 7. Principal investigators should follow [revised standards](#) for human subjects research, if applicable.
 8. Principal investigators should follow guidance for management of [grants and contracts](#).
 9. Principal investigators should develop a plan for a quick ramp-down of research-related activities to a level associated with that of an earlier phase.
 - If a ramp-down is needed, complete the [EHS Laboratory Ramp Down Checklist](#).
 - Additional guidance: [EHS Research Continuity Guidance](#) for Laboratories and Research Facilities.

Additional Considerations and Resources

- Access should be restricted to personnel whose activities cannot be completed from home; work schedules should be staggered to minimize the number of personnel in facilities at the same time. [Example guidance](#) was developed by the Eberly College of Science.
- Anyone who is experiencing symptoms should follow [University guidance](#).
- All researchers should continue to follow Penn State [travel policies](#).
- Researchers at the College of Medicine should follow cleaning guidance provided by the [Office of Biosafety](#).
- Researchers at all other campuses should follow Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) [guidance for cleaning](#).
- Important Contacts
 - **University Police:** Report a concern for your personal security and safety to University Police at 911 or 814-863-1111 (at [University Park](#)) or [your campus police station](#).
 - **Environmental Health and Safety:** Report a safety concern or contact Penn State Environmental Health and Safety at 814-865-6391 or psuehs@psu.edu or [online form](#).
 - **Office of Physical Plant:** Report a building condition or custodial services to OPP Work Reception Center at 814-865-4731.

Thank you in advance for your efforts to keep our community safe,

Lora Weiss, Ph.D.
Senior Vice President for Research
Lora.Weiss@psu.edu

Leslie Parent, MD
Vice Dean for Research and Graduate Studies
College of Medicine
Lparent@psu.edu

Table 1. Penn State Phases for Gradually Increasing On-Campus Research-Related Activities⁵

Testing, contact tracing, and the ability to quarantine will be critical in pacing our transition from one phase to the next.

PHASE	CONDITIONS & CRITERIA	ALLOWED ON-CAMPUS ACTIVITIES & REQUIREMENTS
1 (PA Red)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PA Stay at Home directive in effect. • COVID-19 hospitalizations & ICU admissions increasing in PA and in local community. • COVID-19 testing (PCR/ serology) limited to those with COVID-19 symptoms or high-risk subjects. • PPE shortages widespread. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only approved personnel are permitted on site. • Practice measures for maintaining health and safety. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mandatory physical distancing (at least 6 ft), extensive hand washing, wearing of face masks, and disinfection of areas and equipment used by more than one person • Only essential research-related activities permitted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Activity that if discontinued would generate significant data and sample loss. ○ Activity that if discontinued would pose a safety hazard. ○ Activity that maintains critical equipment in facilities and laboratories. ○ Activity that maintains critical samples, reagents, and materials. ○ Activity that maintains animal populations. ○ Activity that maintains critically needed plant populations, tissue cultures, bacteria, archaea, and other living organisms. ○ COVID-19 related activity that has a timeline for deployment that could address the crisis, including human subjects research. ○ Activity in support of essential human subjects research. ○ Clinical trial activity that if discontinued would negatively impact the patient’s care. • For field research, prioritize seasonal data collection or experiments close to completion whose pause or deferral would lead to catastrophic loss of research results. • All data analysis and computer work that can be conducted remotely should be completed remotely. • All other research should be conducted remotely, including all seminars, group meetings, and one-on-one meetings. • Human subjects research must be conducted remotely; no physical, face-to-face human subjects research unless there is a direct drug or device therapeutic benefit. • Graduate students are required to have approval from their graduate program head to conduct on-campus research.

⁵ This phasing plan has been adapted from the University of Washington’s research restitution plan, the University of California, Berkeley’s phased plan to increase research, and inputs from APLU’s Committee on Research.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undergraduates, external visitors, and visiting scholars must receive prior approval from the relevant academic dean for on-campus research. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undergraduate researchers are governed by student affairs policy. Visiting scholars should follow policy.
<p>2 (Orange) (Preparation for transition)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PA Stay at Home order is relaxed or lifted for the county or region of campus or lab. COVID-19 hospitalizations & ICU admissions have plateaued and are decreasing in PA or in local community of campus or lab. COVID-19 testing capacity insufficient to monitor all employees, staff, and students. PPE is sufficient to start stocking labs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unit leaders (College Deans, Institute Directors, Campus Chancellors, or their designees) and principal investigators should follow <i>Next Steps for Research Units and Investigators</i> Only approved personnel are permitted on site. Practice measures for maintaining health and safety. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mandatory physical distancing (at least 6 ft), extensive hand washing, wearing of face masks, and disinfection of areas and equipment used by more than one person. Each unit should develop plans for operating and prioritizing research activities within the unit Each unit should develop safety procedures (mask use, hand washing, disinfection measures, physical distancing, etc.) and disseminate to faculty, staff, and students In collaboration with OPP, each unit should develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for entering/exiting the buildings and labs, preferred travel-paths to minimize hallway/stairway intersections, restroom signage/communication protocols, and maintaining cleaning stations for those coming and going. Laboratory researchers should consult “Protocol and Checklist for Returning to Laboratories during COVID-19 Restrictions” for additional details. Units should coordinate with EHS on the purchase of necessary supplies for studies to be conducted in the near-term. Prepare sustainable PPE analysis and acquisition plans and start to accumulate 2-3 weeks inventory for PPEs needed. Units should hold training sessions and acquire appropriate signage regarding PPE use. Units should notify core facilities to begin increasing staff and to have standard operating procedures in place for the core facilities. Determine whether there are any changes in parking or transportation. Refer individuals to Penn State hotline for workplace safety issues, conflict resolution regarding back-to-work, and public health of vulnerable populations.
<p>3 (PA yellow)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PA Stay at Home order is relaxed or lifted for the county 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only approved personnel are permitted on site. Practice measures for maintaining health and safety.

	<p>or region of campus or lab.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 hospitalizations & ICU admissions have plateaued and are decreasing in PA or in local community of campus or lab. • COVID-19 testing capacity improving but insufficient to monitor all employees, staff and students. • PPE shortages not widespread with a 2-3 week supply on hand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mandatory physical distancing (at least 6 ft), extensive hand washing, wearing of face masks, and disinfection of areas and equipment used by more than one person. • Plan for rapid return to Phase 1 in place. • Definition of allowable research expanded to include (i) time-sensitive research and (ii) research that requires on-site access and which can be conducted with sufficient physical separation among personnel. This includes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Seasonal data collection, such as field and agricultural work, experiments close to completion, or deadline driven, whose pause or deferral would lead to delay or loss of research results. ○ Field research, but subject to local conditions/restrictions at field sites, travel restrictions, ability to travel safely, and ability to social distance at field sites. • All data analysis and computer work that can be conducted remotely should be completed remotely. • All other research should be conducted remotely, including all seminars, group meetings, and one-on-one meetings. • Animals may be ordered and animal research restarted in accordance with the updated guidance for animal research. • Core facilities can be restarted based on sufficient demand and using staff to perform measurements where work cannot be done remotely. • Human subjects research must be conducted remotely; no physical, face-to-face human subjects research unless there is a direct drug or device therapeutic benefit. Exceptions for some in-person COVID-19-related research and Penn State Health observational studies; see Human Subjects Research Revised Standards. • Face masks must continue to be worn while entering buildings, when inside buildings, and in any other space where it is possible to have close contact with another person for more than 10 minutes. • Graduate students are required to have approval from their graduate program head to conduct on-campus research. • Undergraduates, external visitors, and visiting scholars must receive prior approval from the relevant academic dean for on-campus research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Undergraduate researchers are governed by student affairs policy. ○ Visiting scholars should follow policy. • For each building, maintain SOPs for entering/exiting the buildings and labs, preferred travel-paths to minimize hallway/stairway intersections, restroom signage/communication protocols, and maintained cleaning stations for those coming and going. • Detailed schedules for personnel should be posted on lab/office doors where they can be verified by EHS or unit director.
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	Preparations for next phase.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-assess EHS Research Ramp-up Checklist previously conducted to determine potential impacts and considerations associated with proposed Phase 4 operations. • Orientate new staff to safety operations as outlined in the EHS Research Ramp-up Checklist. • Notify out-of-town staff and trainees so that they can travel back to campus and begin quarantine period prior to reentering lab. • Continue to purchase PPEs and supplies needed for both near- and mid-term research. • Coordinate with unit facility and safety officers to have core campus functions staffed and operational to handle increased workload. • Reassess logistical considerations of having more individuals on campus and on site related to physical distancing, face mask use, and disinfection measures. • Update SOPs and personnel schedules to account for increased number of people or increased time on campus.
4 (PA yellow)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in local area have decreased for two consecutive weeks. • No COVID-19 cases traced to on-site work environment. • Few or no new COVID-19 deaths in region. • COVID-19 testing capacity at or near needed capacity based on available data. • PPE widely available locally. • Further relaxation of restrictions at the state or county level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only approved personnel are permitted on site. • Practice measures for maintaining health and safety. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mandatory physical distancing (at least 6 ft), extensive hand washing, wearing of face masks, and disinfection of areas and equipment used by more than one person. • Plan for rapid return to phases 1-3 in place. • All research approved in phases 1-3 may continue. • Additional on-campus research allowed, as approved by unit leaders. • All research that can be conducted remotely should continue to be, including all seminars, group meetings, and one-on-one meetings. • Human subjects research must be conducted remotely; no physical, face-to-face human subjects research unless there is a direct drug or device therapeutic benefit. Follow Revised Standards. • Face masks must continue to be worn while entering buildings, when inside buildings, and in any other space where it is possible to have close contact with another person for more than 10 minutes. • Libraries are open to limited numbers of researchers using hygiene and social distancing protocols. • Common areas remain closed or restricted by physical distancing. • Graduate students are required to have approval from their graduate program head to conduct on-campus research. • Undergraduates, external visitors, and visiting scholars must receive prior approval from the relevant academic dean for on-campus research

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Undergraduate researchers are governed by student affairs policy. ○ Visiting scholars should follow policy.
	Preparations for next phase.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Evaluate conditions for ramping up full-time clinical research. ● Monitor compliance and review opportunities and threats. ● Evaluate existing operational plans as they relate to the ability to expand the number of people on site at any given time, subject to physical distancing requirements. ● Monitor local external conditions to determine appropriate phase for on-site research activities.
5 <i>(PA green)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● New cases of COVID-19 and resulting hospitalizations have been decreasing for 4-6 consecutive weeks. ● COVID-19 testing is sufficient to meet local needs. ● PPE availability not limiting, with one-month supply on hand. ● No or minimal state restrictions. ● CDC and PA Dept of Health report COVID-19 no longer requires special precautions; restrictions lifted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Practice measures for maintaining health and safety. ● Plans for rapid return to phases 1-4 in place. ● Human subjects research should still be conducted remotely if possible; follow Revised Standards. ● Resume most types of on-site research, albeit at potentially different levels, while maintaining physical distancing, mask wearing, and surface disinfection, as directed. ● Full implementation of some clinical research ● Use of student desks and common areas with physical distancing. ● Graduate students are required to have approval from their graduate program head to conduct on-campus research. ● Undergraduates, external visitors, and visiting scholars must receive prior approval from the relevant academic dean for on-campus research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Undergraduate researchers are governed by student affairs policy. ○ Visiting scholars should follow policy. ● All research and large group meetings that can be held remotely are encouraged; however, small in-person meetings with protective face masks are permitted. ● Recognize that although the State of Pennsylvania may be in green, the university may impose additional restrictions or remain in an earlier phase. Social distancing, universal masking, or other public health guidance may be warranted to help prevent a potential increase in COVID-19 cases.

This table will be evaluated regularly and updated as the situation evolves. As we move through Phase 5, an option to include a sixth phase may be considered. In this sixth phase, it is expected that all types of on-site research will be allowed, all human subjects research will be allowed, full implementation of clinical research will be permitted, there will be no requirements for social distancing or wearing masks, and on-site research occupancy will be 100%. Conditions and criteria for this sixth phase will likely include a vaccine that is widely available and used in combination with widespread testing, identification of new COVID-19 cases, contact tracing, quarantining, and that there are no or minimal state restrictions.