





Allowable Research Activities During the COVID-19 Crisis **Updated** **October 26, 2020**

Note – The COVID-19 pandemic presents a complex and dynamic environment. This document provides the best information and guidance to date but is subject to change as conditions warrant.

The information found below provides additional detail on Allowable Research Activities at UAB During the COVID-19 Crisis. This information, along with the [UAB Principles for Resumption of Research](#) should be used by each unit to develop operational plans. Units are defined by the School/College leadership. While a unit may decide to add additional parameters and guidelines, it may not ignore any principles, guidelines, or restrictions found in this document. An [Operational Plan Template](#) is available that may be used by units and PIs for the development of their safe return to research plans.

The following color code system defines a different set of work criteria rules and regulations:

-  Red – Access Severely Limited (maintenance only, no research)
-  Orange – Limited Business Operations (0% - 25% capacity)
-  Yellow – Modified Business Operations (26% - 74% capacity)
-  Green – Full Access; limited public health restrictions (75% - 100% capacity)


Code Red (no research on campus permitted)

- All buildings are badge access only.
- Access restricted to specific individuals for daily safety inspections only.
- Personnel with any symptoms will not access buildings.
- Personnel entering the buildings must wear a mask and appropriate PPE.

Code Orange (<25% capacity, essential research only).

- All buildings are badge access only.
- No research personnel exhibiting CDC recognized symptoms may access buildings. These are fever, cough, shortness of breath/difficulty breathing, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, diarrhea, sore throat, and/or new loss of taste or smell.
- Effective May 26, 2020 research personnel must have registered for and completed the [COVID-19 Health Assessment Tool](#), a symptom and exposure tracker prior to gaining permission for building access.
- Personnel entering the buildings will wear a mask and site-specific PPE following [CDC recommendations](#).
- Access restricted to those individuals needed to maintain essential research. Trainees, including graduate students, postdocs, and undergrads only allowed on site after [review and permission](#).
- All trainees and personnel not involved in essential studies should work at home (e.g., read, analyze data, and write manuscripts, grants, theses, and dissertations).
- **Essential Research** is that which is intended to mitigate COVID-19, human subjects studies essential for the health and well-being of the participant (with appropriate screenings), studies in progress that must be completed within a specific timeframe to avoid catastrophic data loss, studies needed for an upcoming dissertation defense, and/or maintenance of research animals, cell cultures, liquid nitrogen, CO₂ tanks, and critical equipment maintenance.

- For human subjects essential research (COVID-19 trials, studies critical for the health and well-being of participants), protocols, and considerations must be documented for the following:
 - Screening should be an ongoing process with each subsequent physical encounter and should include consideration of travel to a COVID-19 hot-spot, known or potential contact with infected individuals, and/or CDC recognized symptoms. These are fever, cough, shortness of breath/difficulty breathing, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, and/or new loss of taste or smell.
 - Those participants who screen positive but are asymptomatic and have not been tested should be referred on for COVID-19 RNA test, and then may proceed in a COVID-19 research study if PPE is available for personnel and participants. However, if they are symptomatic or test positive, they cannot proceed in any research activities until they have a COVID-19 RNA negative test.
 - When working with research participants for COVID-19 studies that either screen positive or have been diagnosed with COVID-19 (and are participating in essential studies), the PI must identify protocol needs, including durable and stable supplies of PPE, that are required for personnel and participants. In addition, the PI must establish appropriate protocols for handwashing within the context of the research activities.
 - The UAB IRB does not need to approve the incorporation of screenings, unless the PI or the sponsor wishes to incorporate the data collected as part of a new research objective of the clinical study. If so, the protocol must be amended and approved by the IRB.
- New studies may not be initiated, except those that have the potential to mitigate COVID-19 or are considered essential.
- Grant and contract submissions, and regulatory and scientific review processes can carry forward in planning for future studies.
- To the extent possible, all personnel will keep their powered up, Bluetooth-enabled cell phones on their person while on campus.
- Trainees and personnel should let PIs know when they are in the lab and when they leave.
- When several trainees and laboratory personnel need to be present in the laboratory at the same time, best practices for social distancing must be used, including staggering work times, working 6 feet apart (when possible), and limiting interactions with approximately one individual per 150-250 ft² depending on the respective room layout and density of furniture, benches, and equipment.
- Some activities may require personnel to work within the 6-foot social distancing guidelines. In those situations, it must be confirmed that there are no other alternatives to keep personnel separated by 6 feet. Please note that there will inevitably be incidental contact within the 6-foot guideline (e.g. passing in the hall, on the sidewalk outside, at the bathroom sink, in an animal room or other room with high-density equipment). It is critical to keep those interactions to a minimum, but that kind of interaction is probably not a major source of transmission as the CDC currently defines a “close contact” as being “within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative 15 minutes or longer over a 24 hour period”. Since everyone is considered infected, anyone that must work with someone for a cumulative 15 minutes or longer over a 24 hour period within 6 feet of each other is considered a “close contact.” If any of those individuals subsequently becomes symptomatic, those “close contacts” should contact the relevant oversight group. Employees should contact [Employee Health](#), (205) 934-3675. Students should contact [Student Health Services](#), (205) 934-3580.
- If no one from a lab can physically be present on site, arrange for another lab willing to check the space. If you are in your lab and see that a package has been delivered outside an empty lab, please secure it somewhere safe (especially if needing to be put in fridge/freezer) and contact someone from that lab. Further, if you are on the floor and hear a beeping alarm (freezer, incubator, etc.), please notify the appropriate personnel no one is present.

- Administrative support staff are required to work remotely wherever possible.
- Only UAB personnel are permitted in research areas, except for deliveries or study participants.
- No minors are allowed in administrative or research areas under any circumstances.  **Code Yellow** (26%-74% capacity)
- All buildings are badge access only.
- No research personnel exhibiting CDC recognized symptoms may access buildings. These are fever, cough, shortness of breath/difficulty breathing, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, diarrhea, sore throat, and/or new loss of taste or smell.
- Effective May 26, 2020 research personnel must have registered for and completed the [COVID-19 Health Assessment Tool](#), a symptom and exposure tracker prior to gaining permission for building access.
- Personnel entering the buildings will wear a mask and site-specific PPE following [CDC recommendations](#).
- PIs are required to submit a plan to resume research, which will be reviewed and approved by the unit- defined leadership before moving to Code Yellow conditions. An [Operational Plan Template](#) is available that may be used by units and PIs for the development of their safe return to research plans.
- To the extent possible, all personnel will keep their powered up, Bluetooth-enabled cell phones on their person while on campus.
- Essential research constraints are removed for non-human subjects research, including new studies.
- On or after June 9, 2020, human subjects research that involves close physical contact (or < 6 feet of social distancing) may be re-started or initiated, with adherence to safety consistent with [R2Ops Human Subjects Research Guidelines](#).
- Some activities may require personnel to work within the 6-foot social distancing guidelines. In those situations, it must be confirmed that there are no other alternatives to keep personnel separated by 6 feet. Please note that there will inevitably be incidental contact within the 6-foot guideline (e.g. passing in the hall, on the sidewalk outside, at the bathroom sink, in an animal room or other room with high-density equipment). It is critical to keep those interactions to a minimum, but that kind of interaction is probably not a major source of transmission as the CDC currently defines a “close contact” as being “within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 minutes”. Since everyone is considered infected, anyone that must work with someone for 15 minutes or more within 6 feet of each other is considered a “close contact.” If any of those individuals subsequently becomes symptomatic, those “close contacts” should contact the relevant oversight group. Employees should contact [Employee Health](#), (205) 934-3675. Students should contact [Student Health Services](#), (205) 934-3580.
- Data analysis and writing, laboratory administrative support tasks, and laboratory meetings should be completed remotely whenever possible.
- Personnel and trainees, including researchers at post-doctoral and graduate/pre-doctoral levels, may continue or initiate studies on site following approved unit operational plans. Researchers whose work involves offcampus sites (such as industrial, educational, or health/medical settings) must comply with public health guidelines as recommended by the federal, state, and local authorities, as well as the requirements of the offcampus site.
 - Other trainees engaged in research, such as undergraduates and volunteers, may conduct on-campus research only with the specific approval of their program director and the responsible mentor.
- Only UAB personnel are permitted in research areas, except for deliveries or study participants.

- No minors allowed in research areas, with the exception of minors participating in research studies and those with [approval](#).

Code Green Restrictions (75-100% capacity, normal research operations)

- No symptomatic personnel may access buildings.
- Normal, pre-COVID-19 working operations.

If you feel there is a situation not addressed above, or you feel you are being asked to do something that does not provide adequate infectious risk control, consult your PI and HR representative. Utilize the advice of support departments including [Environmental Health and Safety](#) to define a proper SOP for dealing with that particular situation.

If you need special accommodations due to the COVID-19 pandemic or for any other reason contact the [AWARE](#) Program at UAB. This program provides disability-management services when an employee's job is affected by physical, mental, or emotional impairment.

