

Date: March 17, 2020

To: All UNT Campus Researchers

From: Mark R. McLellan, Vice President for Research & Innovation

RE: March 17<sup>th</sup> Update on campus research operations under COVID19



**General:**

- With a reduced work force on campus, it is important for our office to understand any research laboratories that need to operate under a reduced operation or a closed campus scenario. Please report your lab needs using the prior form distributed to chairs.
- With reduced campus presence, this raises security concerns for research laboratories.
  - Inform all personnel to **carry their UNT identification** with them.
  - All research laboratories should take extra care to **ensure labs are fully locked when not occupied.**
  - The current federal regulations limit gatherings to no more than 10 people.
  - Follow the most current enhanced hygiene practices and procedures outlined by UNT Administration.
  - **Current UNT research limitations regarding space:**
    - All researchers must work no more than six (6) feet next to another researcher AND
    - no more that 2 researchers per bench regardless of the size of the bench **AND**
    - no more that 10 researchers in a laboratory space.

**Grants & Contracts:**

- If any researcher is in a position where they cannot complete their contractual or grant related project due specifically to COVID19, please contact the office of Grants & Contracts Administration. They will negotiate with sponsors to see if there can be granted extensions etc. to help alleviate the issues.

## Human Subjects Research:

- PIs and study teams involved in human subjects research during this COVID19 crisis should postpone activities or revise research procedures to limit in-person contact or at a minimum reduce frequency of subject visits. When possible, replace in-person visits or interactions with remote/electronic methods of communication (e.g. conduct interviews or surveys via phone, videoconferencing or using an online platform)
  - For necessary in-person interactions with study participants, PIs may utilize a short screening - [https://www.research.psu.edu/covid\\_orp\\_screening](https://www.research.psu.edu/covid_orp_screening) (c/o Penn State) - for exposure or symptoms of illness of COVID-19, before they are scheduled for any study-related visits and in-person interactions. The screening does **not** require IRB approval.
- Action Items:
  - Follow the recommendations from the CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>).
  - Consider the participant population (e.g. “high-risk” for COVID-19) and the setting in which the interaction would occur.
  - Follow proper safety procedures for handling specimens that may contain COVID-19. Human specimens are handled at Biosafety Level 2 (BSL-2) laboratories. Appropriate PPE should be worn in BSL-2 laboratories. The CDC offers additional guidance: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/lab/lab-biosafety-guidelines.html>. If you have any questions, contact [biosafety@unt.edu](mailto:biosafety@unt.edu).
- Protocol Procedures:
  - Federal regulations maintain oversight of the IRB to review revisions to any approved protocols before they are implemented, with one exception, “*where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the human subjects.*” (<https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfcfr/CFRSearch.cfm?fr=6.108>). PIs and study teams may include actions to reduce potential exposure to COVID-19, or to continue to provide medically necessary study care (mental health assessments or continuance of study drug).
    - If your study procedures meet the criteria for apparent and immediate hazard to subjects, you can implement the changes immediately without prior notice or approval from the IRB. You will need to ensure that you are not introducing new or additional risks to subjects, and you must report the change within 5 business days to the IRB via email at [untirb@unt.edu](mailto:untirb@unt.edu).

- If you have any questions or concerns related to human subjects protocols, contact [untirb@unt.edu](mailto:untirb@unt.edu). The Research Integrity and Compliance staff members are checking this email with greater frequency to assist you as needed.

**Division of Research & Innovation – moving to remote operations:**

- Research Administration moves to full skeleton operations starting tomorrow. We will have only one person in our main office rotating between myself (M,W,F) and Pam Padilla (T,Th). All others will be remote.
- OGCA will have only a handful of staff still present starting tomorrow until we get laptop computers purchased. They will move to a skeleton crew to handle checks, etc.
- RCA is now operating fully remote.
- RIC is down to one person on site, all others are remote.
- Teams software is our primary vehicle for interoperability among the division. All employees of the division are fully functioning under Teams and can be reached via Teams chat.
- If you need to reach someone try to connect via (1) Teams or (2) email or if needed (3) call the office (phones will be forwarded to personal cell phones).