

Return to Research Plan

This plan relates to on and off campus research activities only and is in addition, not superseding, the [Texas Christian University Return to Campus plan](#) for the phased return of personnel. Individuals should not feel pressured to return to on-campus scholarly activities if they are in [high risk categories that increase their vulnerability and susceptibility relative to COVID-19](#) or are living with someone who is immunocompromised. The employee may contact Human Resources to seek accommodations for their condition. Supervisors can work with the employee and Human Resources to identify alternative work arrangements and/or seek support/resources.

The paramount principle is the health and safety of our communities, especially of vulnerable individuals. Consequently, we will take a phased approach to reopening. The goal of this communication is to outline the steps for resuming research activities and provide guidance to researchers who will be expected to create specific plans for their activities and personnel. Additional updates and resources will be posted at the [TCU COVID-19 website](#) and the [Office of Research website](#). **Please be aware that if there is a significant increase in COVID-19 infections, it may be necessary to return quickly to restricted operations.**

Presently, only “essential” activities being performed by designated persons are allowed. As preparation for and resumption of research activities are commenced, [protective measures will remain essential to protect yourselves and others](#) These include:

- Maintain social distancing at all times.
 - Stay at least 6 feet (2 meters) from other people
 - Do not gather in groups
 - Stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings (> 10 people)
- Maintain good personal hygiene, including proper hand washing, cough/sneeze etiquette, avoid touching your face, eyes, nose and mouth.
- Have hand sanitizer available at all building entrances and at access points for each floor.
- Use appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to protect oneself and others from the spread of the virus while within the labs as well as within the research building.
- Clean/disinfect high-touch locations in shared spaces, including laboratories.
- Conduct [Daily Health Self-Assessment](#) prior to coming to campus for new or worsening [signs or symptoms of possible COVID-19](#). **Do not come to work if ill or exhibiting signs or symptoms of COVID-19.**

The research activities deemed *essential* at present range from animal care activities, maintenance of critical equipment and laboratory and other facility checks. Increasing the level of research beyond essential activity will occur in phases and will depend on

- Access to an adequate and reliable supply of appropriate disinfectants and PPE, including any that may already be required by IACUC or biosafety protocols.
- Recalibration or certification of certain equipment, particularly related to safety, before resumption of use.
- Access to necessary research supplies and materials, including ordering, shipping, receiving, and delivery to normal building delivery locations.

- Access to supplies of research animals, including necessary animal care activities.

PHASE 1: Faculty and laboratory supervisors are permitted to return to campus to conduct preparatory activities under strict social distancing and PPE guidelines. Preparatory activities such as lab cleaning, instrument activation/calibration, supply ordering, etc., may commence on **June 1, 2020. This phase is intended to “prepare” laboratory and other facilities for possible entry into phase 2 research activity. All personnel must complete required Return-To-Campus Orientation prior to returning to campus.**

PHASE 2: (June 8, 2020)

1. **Faculty, research staff, post-docs and graduate students pursuing dissertation/thesis research (not undergraduate students)** are permitted to return to campus for research purposes under strict social distancing and PPE guidelines.
2. Continue remote work to the fullest extent possible for activities such as literature review, data analysis, and writing.
3. Please see [TCU Mary Couts Burnett Library website](#) for access to and protocols for use of library resources.
4. **Faculty, graduate students and research personnel must follow protective measures indicated above and the following hygiene procedures for all research locations to include:**
 - All personnel should wear face coverings (i.e., use of a material to cover the nose and mouth) in shared spaces, including laboratories and hallways.
 - Cleaning of all door and cabinet handles, bench surfaces, keyboards, instrument control panels, etc. at the beginning and end of the day, or, if researchers are working in shifts, at the beginning and end of every shift.
 - All shared equipment, including computer keyboards and tables should have user interface surfaces cleaned between every user.
 - Other “high touch” items such as hand tools, micro-pipettors, faucet handles, chemical and spray bottles, chair backs and arm rests, pens and whiteboard markers should be cleaned between users.
 - Masks must be worn in shared spaces (hallways, restrooms)
 - Whenever possible, a 6-ft distance must be kept between individuals walking in hallways and during any chance encounters
 - Frequent hand washing and use of disinfectant gel/hand sanitizer as available.
 - Follow TCU Return to Campus plan for care of personal workspaces
5. Lab occupancy should be limited to those necessary to conduct the research. Additionally, access to faculty offices and common laboratory and office spaces should be limited to comply with social distancing rules. Consequently, social distancing may require significant revision of normal procedures. Steps to reduce laboratory and/or office occupancy may include:
 - Continuing remote work to the extent possible for activities such as literature review, data analysis, and writing.

- Establishing rotating shifts for lab members.
 - Reducing the number of researchers present per laboratory to 3 or less depending on the size of the lab. Maximum density should be kept to less than 1 person per 100 sq. ft., with no more than 1 person per laboratory bench, hood, glove box, biosafety cabinet, etc., at any time.
 - Establishing one-way flow through doorways, i.e., designate and label an entrance and exit door for each laboratory, if possible.
 - Posting schedules for the use of each laboratory space and/or piece of shared equipment, including names and contact information for all users. This includes facilities that are shared by multiple research groups. Sign-in sheets are recommended for any space or instrument with four or more users, and in any small research room accommodating more than 1 person.
 - Faculty offices shall be used only by the faculty to which they are assigned. Faculty may use their offices at their discretion for all teaching-, research-, and service-related tasks at this time, but no in-person meetings with students or others.
 - Shared graduate offices should remain closed or/if necessary occupied on a rotating basis such that offices are occupied by no more than one student at a time and all high-touch and shared surfaces cleaned with an EPA-approved disinfectant that is effective against COVID-19 between use.
6. **No undergraduate students are permitted in labs or offices during phase 1 or 2.**
Undergraduate researchers may perform research-related tasks from remote locations as possible.
 7. No in-person meetings (two or more individuals) are permitted; all communication must occur online or via phone, even within the building.
 8. **Researchers working with living organisms** should continue to wear the appropriate PPE and observe the appropriate protocols for their research. It is recognized that some procedures, such as surgeries, may require multiple personnel to work in close proximity. Such activities should be carried out with the minimum number of personnel feasible and allowable. Any deviations from approved protocols must have prior approval by the cognizant body (IACUC, IRB, IBC, etc.).
 9. The operating principle as research activities are resumed initially for research involving human subjects or contact with the public is to limit the exposure of TCU researchers to members of the external community in the course of their research activities. At present, TCU bans on travel and on visitors to campus remain in effect (<https://www.tcu.edu/coronavirus/travel.php>). Exceptions to this travel suspension must be approved by the appropriate Vice Chancellor via email and any international travel must be registered using the **TCU Faculty & Staff Authorizations & Registration** system.
 10. **Human subject research activities** should follow earlier guidance (<https://research.tcu.edu/coronavirus-covid-19-impact-on-tcu-research/>).
 - Any in-person participant interaction must immediately pause. Research procedures involving no direct in-person interactions with participants may continue (e.g. data analysis, online surveys, telephone interviews). This applies to both exempt and non-exempt research studies.

- During this pause, researchers should consider whether it is feasible to modify their in-person participant research procedures to use alternative methods to gather study data (e.g. telephone, online). Investigators with protocols currently approved for in-person participant interaction can submit amendments to transition to alternative (i.e., remote) methods by submitting an [amendment modification request form](#) to IRBsubmit@tcu.edu. Please make sure the study protocol and consent forms are updated appropriately.
 - Research visits that cannot be performed remotely and are not essential to a participant's health and/or well-being should be postponed until further notice.
 - Enrollment of new participants in human subject-related research should be allowed only if: 1) participation in the trial is essential to a participant's health and/or well-being (must be cleared by TCU IRB in order to continue with restrictions); or 2) the enrollment and longitudinal participant management can be conducted remotely for the duration of the COVID-19 outbreak.
 - All new protocols submitted to the IRB for review that do not require direct in-person interactions with participants will be reviewed according to our normal processes. Those new protocols that require in-person interactions will be reviewed and feedback provided; however, start dates for protocols requiring in-person interactions will be placed on hold.
9. Researchers are reminded to follow proper safety procedures for handling human specimens that may contain COVID-19. Human specimens are handled at Biosafety Level 2 (BSL-2). Researchers are reminded that appropriate PPE (lab coats, gloves, eye protection and face shields) should be worn in BSL-2 laboratories and procedures should be performed within a biological safety cabinet if there is a risk of infection. The CDC offers additional guidance: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/lab/lab-biosafety-guidelines.html>.

PHASE 3: (August 17, 2020)

1. Undergraduate students are permitted to participate in on-campus research activities only.
 - PIs continue to coordinate activities to prevent crowding in lab space. Each PI must determine the maximum number of people who may be present in each room at the same time depending on the size of the room; the maximum number should be posted on the door. The maximum number must not exceed the number required to maintain social distancing and lab personnel providing supervision should wear appropriate PPE if close distancing is required during supervision of UG research activities.
2. **Human subject research activities** will be phased in according to guidance provided by the Office of Research (<https://research.tcu.edu/coronavirus-covid-19-impact-on-tcu-research/>).

PHASE 4: TBD (Return to “pre-COVID-19 functioning while continuing to exercise hygienic practices.)

Notes:

All researchers should be cognizant of the fact that the infection and spread of COVID-19 in any facility on campus will likely require a return to essential activities only, or even greater restrictions depending on the location and circumstances.

All persons should review the [TCU Return to Campus](#) plan and adhere to enclosed policies and procedures. Individual units may implement screening procedures, including measurement of individual's temperatures, or other wellness checks, as they see fit. Instructions for responding to confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19 may be found within the Return to Campus plan.

PIs are responsible for developing and implementing appropriate management plans for their laboratories and for training their personnel on appropriate cleaning and disinfecting, hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette.

TCU is committed to a safe, welcoming campus that promotes respecting the differences among the Horned Frog community and our fellow citizens of the world. During this crisis, it is especially critical to uphold our values of inclusivity. Visit the "Viruses Don't Discriminate" page on tcu.edu/coronavirus for more information.