

Provost Plan for Return to Academic Research Activities * (Updated 4/8/2021)

The following outlines a plan for return of researchers to University labs and field research. Enforcement and supervision to assure that the requirements for re-engagement are occurring will be the responsibility of department chairs and deans in the respective colleges in consultation with Dr. Bill Duncan, Vice Provost for Research and Sponsored Programs.

The Vice Provost will post to the Research and Sponsored Programs website the approved plan and specific safety or regulatory instructions to ensure safety during the pandemic, such as the following:

The conditions of re-engagement of research activities in laboratories:

1. Only those personnel who need to be in the laboratory should be allowed. (Update 6/4/2020)
2. When more than one person is in the laboratory, 6 ft. social distancing is required and masks are mandatory. The number of individuals working in the laboratory is limited only by the size of the laboratory to ensure 6 ft. social distancing. Exceptions will require approval. (Update 4/8/2021)
3. Only essential visitors are allowed in the laboratory (e.g. instrument repair technicians, liquid nitrogen delivery personnel, etc.). (Update 6/4/2020)
4. Social distancing (6 ft) will be required in laboratories and in common areas.
5. Masks (bilayer cloth or standard surgical mask) will be worn in all common areas and in any laboratory where more than one person is located.
6. When two researchers are required to be present and in close proximity for a given experimental procedure, they will wear masks. (Update 4/8/2021)
7. Staff should wash hands or use a hand sanitizer at regular intervals. (Update 6/4/2020)
8. When convening in groups (lunchrooms, conference rooms, or bathrooms) masks and social distancing is required. (Update 4/8/2021)
9. Eat in your private office if available, otherwise, eat sitting outside if possible; if eating in a common area, wipe down surface areas with disinfectants after use. (Update 6/4/2020)
10. Door handles and bench and equipment surfaces within the laboratories will be decontaminated with 70% ethanol on a daily basis. EPA approved disinfectants may be used in addition to 70% alcohol (<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>). (Update 6/4/2020)
11. Laboratories that have two entry doors will have one as an “enter only” and one as an “exit only”. When there is only one door, a “knock-knock” policy can be used to ensure social distancing through the doorway.
12. All personnel with fever (temperature >100°F) or other symptoms of COVID-19 shall not come to work until the symptoms have been completely resolved or have been appropriately evaluated. (Update 4/8/21)
13. Lab meetings will be held via Zoom or when in person, social distancing is maintained. (Update 4/8/21)
14. Re-engagement of any personnel shall be voluntary and not coerced.
15. NOTE: Administrative and clerical staff are not required to return to the laboratory when researchers return but will follow the guidelines and recommendations that the University prescribes for employees by classification.

The conditions of re-engagement of human subject research requiring face-to-face interaction:

1. Beginning June 15, 2020 ETSU, will allow in-person research interactions with approval from the Vice Provost for Research and Sponsored Programs. Approval is contingent upon there being no remote alternative and with safety precautions in place. **Update 6-21-20**
2. Physical or in-person study visits should continue be replaced with phone or video sessions where possible. Where in-person procedures are required, identify the minimum number of in-person interactions that are essential for the research purpose that cannot occur in an alternative way.
3. Investigators should record their temperature daily and if a fever or COVID-19 symptoms develop, the investigator should be checked/tested and only return to interacting with subjects following a negative test.
4. Implement participant pre-screening (https://www.etsu.edu/irb/documents/template_screening_tool.docx) regarding COVID-19 symptoms or exposure and only schedule in-person procedures with participants that are presumed COVID-19 negative.
5. Investigators should provide participants with a copy of the [ETSU Safety Guidelines for Research](#) that describes safety precautions in place to protect the research community prior to obtaining consent. **Update 6-21-20**
6. PPE (see [Request to Initiate or Resume Form](#)) use by the investigator and subjects is required for all human subject research requiring face-to-face interaction. Investigators should supply any research subject with a mask to be used during the interaction. **Update 6-21-20**
7. Ensure hand sanitizer and/or hand washing facilities are readily available.
8. Establish disinfecting and sterilization protocols for any equipment or study materials to be used during research visits. **Update 6-21-20**
9. Social distancing (6 ft) should be observed during the interaction. In cases where social distancing is not feasible, gloves and eye protection should be used.
10. Schedule research visits such that appointments do not overlap with other participants and disinfect in between each appointment. **Update 6-21-20**
11. All previously approved IRB studies involving face-to-face interactions currently suspended must be reviewed for COVID-19 related safety issues prior to re-starting enrollment of new subjects. Please submit the [Request to Initiate or Resume Form](#) to the Vice Provost for Research (duncanw@etsu.edu) for permission to re-start your study. **Update 6-21-20**
12. The VPR will review all new studies requiring in-person interactions submitted the IRB to assess the covid-19 related safety issues and ensure compliance with these guidelines. **Update 6-21-20**

Other issues to consider:

Student or faculty research projects requiring access to local schools, Ballard or other external clinics may face additional restrictions, including a limit on the number of ETSU personnel allowed to enter the campus or clinic. The Department or College may need to prioritize projects that require such access.

*Consistent with recommendations from Dr. Bill Duncan, Vice Provost for Research and Sponsored Program from Research Town Hall Meeting and petition from Associate Dean for Research and Chair of the Department of Biomedical Sciences.