

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) for Research & Graduate Education

GENERAL QUESTIONS:

What VPREDGE services will be available during this period?

Operations in all VPREDGE Units (Office of Sponsored Programs, Graduate School, and Office of Research Compliance) are normal until further notice. Communication will be sent by our listservs, Vice President of Research and posted on this website if there are changes.

Should I set up a communication plan with my research group?

Yes, if a communication plan for your research group is not already in place, designate points of contact so everyone receives timely information.

Can I continue my laboratory and/or field research?

Individuals working in laboratories and the field are critical to the MSU's mission. At this time, we encourage principal investigators/supervisors to assess their unique circumstances and decide if they would like to continue research as normal or move to remote research options. One thing we encourage is to consider limiting the number of individuals coming to work in the lab, and to reiterate recommended steps of social distancing, good handwashing practices, and adhering to appropriate cleaning and sanitation practices. Individuals with a fever (defined by the CDC as a temperature above 100.4F or 38.0C) or showing signs of respiratory disease (coughing, shortness of breath) should be discouraged from coming to work.

Can I allow my research team, including GRAs and staff, to work remotely?

Yes, principal investigators/supervisors have this discretion. Please be clear with your expectations, and be sure you have made appropriate accommodations to allow the remote work with Human Resources.

Can I require my research team, including GRAs and staff, to work on-campus?

At this time, you may require work on-campus if it is critical to the research. However, we encourage you to be as flexible as possible. You must also allow for students and staff to pursue available leave options.

What do I do if I am running out of critical Personnel Protective Equipment (PPE)?

Due to the requirement for PPE in managing COVID-19, MSU must plan for a potential PPE shortage. The objective of this plan will be to maintain research activities, but at the same time ensure a safe working environment. For options and resources on PPE options, please refer to the [MSU Response Plan to Potential PPE Shortage Due to COVID-19](#).

What is the contingency plan for research animal care?

The Animal Research Center (ARC) has a pandemic response as part of the overall disaster plan. MSU's Attending Veterinarian and ARC staff are considered essential employees and will be expected to come in during a disaster. In addition to the broad ARC disaster plan, MSU has taken additional steps in preparing for COVID-19 by developing a COVID-19 Disease Outbreak plan. Whenever there is a possibility that there will be a significant loss of staff or limited access to animals due to COVID-19, the ARC will identify volunteers who would be willing and able to come to the facility, and work will be limited to life supporting activities.

I am a Graduate Student; can I defend my thesis/dissertation remotely?

Yes, the Graduate School recently provided guidance that the requirement to be physically present for the thesis/dissertation defense could be waived. Work with your advisor to discuss options, and contact the Graduate School if there are questions or concerns.

Do these guidelines for research and graduate education also apply to Montana's Agricultural Experiment Station (MAES) and MSU Extension?

Yes, these guidelines apply to all research at MSU, including MAES and Extension.

SPONSORED PROGRAMS OFFICE QUESTIONS

I am self-isolated quarantined, and/or at home caring for a sick family member and am unable to submit my grant by the stated deadline. May I request an extension? Where can I get more information on sponsor-specific policies concerning COVID-19?

Check directly with your specific sponsor. Below are recent links posted from NIH and NSF on this issue:

NIH Guidance: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-20-083.html>

NSF Guidance: https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2020/nsf20053/nsf20053.jsp?WT.mc_id=USNSF_80

Can I still charge my grant if I am working remotely from home?

Yes, if you are able to conduct research related to the project (i.e., data analysis, data interpretation, literature review, etc.) then you can justify. If you have additional questions, contact your OSP fiscal manager.

HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Will the Institutional Review Board (IRB) continue to operate and review protocols and amendments?

Yes, the IRB will continue to function. Moreover, we are making contingency plans to conduct reviews and meetings virtually as needed.

Due to COVID-19, I would like to stop conducting in-person interviews with research participants, and would like to conduct them by phone, email, video conferencing or online survey/software? Do I need to modify my IRB protocol?

Yes, if you would like to conduct research remotely, via phone, email, video conferencing or online survey/software, these changes must be approved in advance by the IRB as an amendment to your original protocol. Each situation will be reviewed and approved as rapidly as possible. The IRB staff are available at 406-994-4706.

Do I need to do anything if I choose to continue in person interviews?

Yes, research participants should be asked to complete a short screening for exposure to COVID-19 or symptoms of illness before they are scheduled for any study-related visits and in-person interactions. This specific screening should be done verbally, and the procedure does not require IRB approval. For appropriate screening questions please see [COVID-19 IRB Guidance](#).

Would you ever consider putting a hold on IRB work?

Yes, we would consider this if we received guidance from government and/or health officials that this was necessary. However, this is not the case presently, and we encourage safe practice of human research at this time.