

Montana Technological University
COVID-19 Guidelines for Off-campus Field Research

Updated May11 for transition to Research Level 1, on or after May 18, 2020

The Office of Research has posted COVID-19 guidance for varying on-campus laboratory research operations levels: (<https://www.mtech.edu/research/MTech-Research%20Operation-Levels.pdf>) Here we provide guidelines for **off-campus field studies** conducted by Montana Tech researchers and students. Field studies outside the borders of the United States are prohibited during the COVID-19 emergency. Level 2 and above require leaders of field-research activities to complete and submit to researchoffice@mtech.edu a Research Operations Plan (<https://www.mtech.edu/research/MTech-Research-Operation-Response-template.pdf>).

NOTE: Dealing with COVID-19 is dynamic. Research restrictions may change with little advance notice. Before and during travel, the PI should check current restrictions and guidelines as provided by the CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>), county/city health department (BSB AND the field site's), the Governor's office(s) for Montana and any other state where the field work will be conducted, and the external funding agency, if applicable. If Research Operations Levels increase during the field project, the team should be prepared to return to campus, update the plan, and possibly pause or stop the field work. *The most restrictive applicable guidelines must be followed for the specific location of the field study.*

Overall Considerations

All researchers and students participating in field research must self-assess their health prior to departing for field research and daily during the project. In the event of symptoms, the affected individual(s) should not leave home or should return home and self quarantine at the earliest opportunity, and notify the team leader/PI.

If anyone involved with a field research project tests positive for COVID-19 during the project, the entire team should return home without delay; all members should self-quarantine for 2 weeks; and the PI or team leaders should notify the cognizant dean/director and the Research Office (researchoffice@mtech.edu). All equipment and vehicles involved with the trip should be out of service for at least 7 days or be deep-cleaned (see research operations guidelines (<https://www.mtech.edu/research/MTech-Research%20Operation-Levels.pdf>)).

The PI should already have in place the following:

1. List of essential personnel for each project.
2. Communications plan that includes who is responsible for what work, including back-ups if personnel need to leave the research site, and emergency contacts at Tech and for team members. The Communications plan should be filed with the Department Head or Director and the Research Office (researchoffice@mtech.edu) and a copy should be kept with the team.

3. Determination of which field studies are deemed "mission critical" and for how long each study could persist with minimal in-person activity and supervision (e.g. downloads or readings from monitoring systems and locations).
4. Identification of faculty and staff who are (or could be) cross-trained to support multiple projects in a locale, wherever possible.
5. Specific COVID-19 supplies, such as face coverings, masks, gloves, and sanitizers (e.g. 2% bleach solution, .70% alcohol-based sanitizers).

Requirements for Field Work during Operations Level 1 for COVID-19

1. **Planning, documentation, and approvals** must be in place as appropriate to the Research Operations Level in effect. Research Operations Levels may change. Be sure to check the Research Office web site to ascertain the Level in effect. Generally, Montana Tech allows 24 hours for research teams to provide information and obtain approvals, whenever the Research Operations Level increases.
2. **Special Supplies:** In addition to providing the normal safety and first-aid supplies, the PI is responsible for providing necessary disinfectant and sanitation supplies including gloves, cleaners, alcohol, face coverings, masks.
3. **General hygiene:** Wash hands often with warm water and soap, for a minimum of 20 seconds as often as field work allows. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 70% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and *rub them together until they feel dry*. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Cover all sneezes/coughs with a tissue or with your shirt sleeve. Wear protective gloves (latex, nitrile, or rubber), if appropriate, when using furniture, cooking gear, equipment, or vehicles shared among team members that cannot be sanitized between users.
4. **General disinfecting:** Use disinfectant wipes to disinfect surfaces used by multiple team members or if they could have been touched by members of the public or landowners within the past week. If disinfectant wipes are not available, use paper towels and a spray bottle of diluted household bleach solution (2 tablespoons bleach per quart of water) or alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol. **Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser.** If surfaces are dirty, clean them first using a detergent or soap and water.
5. **Shared equipment.** Ideally provide individual equipment to each team member (rock hammer, magnifying glass, iPad, GPS, binoculars, etc.). Any shared gear (e.g. binoculars, GPS units, XRF, etc.), must be disinfected using alcohol-based or Clorox-based sanitizers or wipes and air dried or wiped dry before handing it over to someone else.
6. **Distances between people must be at least 6 feet** (preferably larger) at all times during field research. This requirement applies to eating, cooking, meeting, sample acquisition, surveying, note-taking, and other activities. It applies to distances between members of the research team and with landowners and other members of the public.
7. **Field activities where people cannot safely be at least 6 feet apart.** In cases where it is impossible to maintain social distancing (such as safe handling of wild animals), it is especially crucial for team members to complete the activity in a safe and efficient manner. In such conditions the crew members should: A) wear N95 masks (ensure they are fit-tested before leaving for the field), and B) carefully sanitize all participants after completing the activity.

- 8. OPT-OUT By Technicians and Students.** In consultation with the PI and field crew leader, members of field crews may always enact more stringent protections for themselves, or decline to take part in any or all work they feel puts them at unwarranted risk.

Specific Considerations for Off-Campus Field Work

- 1. Prior to Travel:** All relevant trainings and permissions must be in place for each team member, and verified before initiating any travel to field sites (e.g., first aid, animal-related and other permits, consent from landowners, Institutional Review Board, etc.). During Level 2, the team should return home at the end of each field day. During Level 1, overnight and multi-day travel for field research is acceptable.
- 2. Vehicles:** To reduce risk of contagion, no passengers are allowed in vehicles during Level 2, only the driver. During Level 1, one passenger is allowed for each row of seats behind the front seats, with the occupants of the rows sitting by alternate windows, to maximize distancing. Face coverings are also encouraged for vehicle occupants. Gas pumps (and any other surfaces to be handled) should be sanitized before filling vehicles, and drivers should stay at least 6 feet away from other people at service stations.
- 3. Meetings, meals, and social gatherings** should take place outside whenever possible, maintaining at least 6 feet separation between people. In the event of inclement weather, field team members can eat in their tents (if not precluded by concern about bears) or rotate through a shared shelter/kitchen with no more than two people per 300 square feet or 7 people per 1000 square feet, while taking care to maintain at least 6 feet of separation.
- 4. Dining and Food Preparation During Field Research:** When food preparation is required during the trip, personnel must adhere to the following guidelines:
 - When first entering the kitchen, personnel preparing food or handling utensils must first wash hands with soap and water for >20 seconds.
 - Cooking and food-preparation surfaces and utensils need to be sterilized (while wearing rubber or plastic gloves) with Clorox-based or alcohol-based sanitizers.
 - As part of kitchen cleanup, dishes must be washed in hot soapy water and rinsed in dilute bleach.
- 5. Lodging During Field Research:** Every effort MUST be made to provide individual living arrangements for field researchers, such as a single-occupancy hotel room or tent. Take care to sanitize hotel rooms, to prevent contracting the disease from a prior occupant or hotel staff. If two or more people must share living quarters, the personnel involved may need to implement a 2-week "self quarantine" after leaving the field situation.
- 6. Restrooms, bathrooms, and shower facilities:** Upon entering, disinfect surfaces that you will handle (e.g., toilet, sink, shower faucet knobs, door knob/lock) using a disposable disinfectant cloth or a paper towel with alcohol or Clorox-based sanitizer. Before leaving disinfect all surfaces. Take your personal items (towels, hand towels, shampoo/conditioner, toothbrush/paste, etc.) with you and keep them in your personal space. Do not leave them in the bathroom.