



# Montana Tech Levels of Research Operations for COVID-19 Emergency

Updated May 11, 2020

## SPECIAL NOTICE: In the Event a Research Team Member is Confirmed to Have COVID-19

Laboratories and Research Groups must follow Montana Tech guidelines in accordance with CDC recommendations for disinfecting facilities, equipment, and vehicles in event that a team member is confirmed to have COVID-19. The following disinfection methods are approved, and one of these two options will be selected in consultation with the principal investigator (PI), department head or director, Research Office (RO), and Environmental Health & Safety Office (EH&S) if the group has a confirmed COVID-19 case:

- **OPTION 1: Seven-day shutdown of the laboratory or field research activity.** Entrance into the laboratory and use of field vehicles is prohibited during the seven-day period unless approved by Research Office for short-term entry with appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to take care of organisms, experiments, or systems that cannot be left unattended for 7 days. This option will be the default, unless a PI has coordinated with RO and EH&S an acceptable plan for deep cleaning that will not harm equipment, experiments, and neighboring laboratories, spaces and equipment.
- **OPTION 2: Deep cleaning of the laboratory, vehicle(s), and equipment.** Disinfection of porous items (i.e., lab notebooks, cardboard, etc.) sensitive equipment, reagents, and experimental samples may be impacted by this option. Please note that if it is determined that EH&S-approved deep-cleaning methods could harm neighboring laboratories, equipment, and spaces, this method may not be an option. The cost of deep cleaning must be covered by budgets available to the PI/Department/Center.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Level 0: Normal

- Normal operations

### Level 1: Caution and Preparation for Modified Operations

- **Stay out of the lab and away from the research group if you are not feeling well or have any of these symptoms: cough, shortness of breath, fever, chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell.**
- Social distancing (i.e., >6 ft perimeter) required. Lab occupancy limited to three persons at a time for large labs.
- Face coverings are strongly encouraged for all. N95-type masks are not recommended, except where they are the appropriate PPE due to the nature of the work.
- Consider instituting rotations and/or split schedules of lab work, and telework options to reduce the number of individuals in the laboratory at any one time.
- Maintain good hygiene practices consistent with CDC guidelines. Key guidelines include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - Frequent hand washing with soap and warm water.
  - Avoid touching your face, eyes, nose and mouth.
  - Frequent disinfection of common areas, surfaces, and equipment, especially those handled or used by more than one person.
- Teleworking encouraged when possible. Work with supervisor and HR for approval.
- Consider slowing down and/or temporarily halting data acquisition and/or transitioning to a mode of data analysis and report writing, if possible.
- If you cannot reasonably slow down or halt a study, you must develop a written plan you and your group will follow to manage work during Level 2 research operations. Level 2 might be declared with little notice.
  - These written plans do *not* need to be formally submitted during Level 1, UNLESS you seek an exception to the occupancy limits or any other precautions.
  - You are encouraged to consult with your supervisor, staff and/or the Office of Research with questions.
  - Submit the plan, if you seek an exception to Level 1 constraints.
  - Be ready to submit the plan, if you need to request an approved exception during Level 2.

- Plan Template is available as Appendix A and on the Research Office web page.
- Include how key laboratory functions or field activities that must remain in working order will be handled for your research to survive a prolonged shutdown (e.g., cell lines, equipment needing liquid nitrogen, etc.).
- Include how hazards can be eliminated or controlled through a prolonged shutdown (for example chemical reactions that evolve over time; fume hood operation).
- Include mitigation plans to prevent loss of critical supplies, reagents and other materials.
- Determine if you can work without certain shared campus resources being available (i.e., mail room, accounting services, janitorial work, routine pick-ups, etc.).
- Work with IT proactively to ensure key members of your research team can access data and essential specialized software remotely, if campus access is limited (e.g., VPN).

### **Level 2: Modified Operations with Approved Exceptions**

- Prepare and submit a plan describing how the lab or field research will slow down or shut down department head or director and Office of Research within 24 hours of the announcement of Level 2 (see Appendix A). This plan may request and justify an exemption from slowdown/shutdown.
  - This plan must designate no more than three lab members as essential staff, unless adequate justification is provided AND adequate social distancing can be maintained with a larger number.
  - This plan must outline procedures (e.g., rotations, driving separate vehicles, sanitizing, face coverings, etc.) to ensure social distancing.
- Essential experiments allowed under guidance of an approved plan (see Appendix A) – those experiments that, if discontinued, would lead to significant financial or data loss; or experiments which are contributing to solving the situation.
- Most research buildings will be locked and should only be accessed by the PI and lab members designated as essential staff. Do not prop open any doors or allow anyone that is non-essential to piggyback in.
- Maintenance and access to key shared resources continue under appropriate guidelines and approved plans (i.e., plants, cell lines, liquid nitrogen, etc.)

### **Level 3: Mandatory Shutdown with VCR Approved Exceptions**

- Mandatory laboratory and field-work shutdown for all research activities and groups, except exceptions approved by the Vice Chancellor for Research.
- No new experiments may start, unless approved by Office of Research.

### **Level 4: Mandatory Shutdown with Chancellor-Approved Exceptions**

- Mandatory laboratory and field-work shutdown for all research groups, unless designated as an exception by the Vice Chancellor for Research and the Chancellor.

## APPENDIX A: Response Plan for Level 2, 3, and 4 Research Operations

Laboratory Principal Investigator(s):

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Dept/Center: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Dept/Center: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Laboratory or Group Name and Location(s):

Laboratory/Group Purpose or Name:

\_\_\_\_\_

Building(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Room Number(s): \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Are you able to transition all of your team (i.e., postdocs, students and staff) to remote work for at least the next 15 days\* (i.e., data analysis, data interpretation, writing, literature review, etc.)?**

- YES
- NO

\* Please recognize that the 15 days is a minimum, but the laboratory shutdown may be longer. You will always have a chance to revisit this form and update.

If YES, sign and date this form, and provide a copy to your supervisor and the Office of Research.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If NO, continue to Question 2.

**2. Are you able to transition some of your team to remote work for at least the next 15 days\* (i.e., data analysis, data interpretation, writing, literature review, etc.)?**

- YES
- NO

List the team members that you are able to transition to remote work and provide a short description of what you've asked each member to work on. *Be sure to abide by contract terms and consult with Human Resources with any questions.*

*[Feel free to expand this field or attach a document/plan]*

List the team members that you are NOT able to transition to remote work, and provide a short description of what your plan is (i.e., leave options, temporary layoff, appeal as essential staff and seek approval for continued in-laboratory work, etc.). *Be sure to abide by contract terms and consult with Human Resources with any questions.*

*[Feel free to expand this field or attach a document/plan]*

**3. Would closing your laboratory or field-work lead to significant financial or data loss?**

- YES
- NO

If NO, please sign and date this form, provide a copy to your supervisor and the Office of Research, and temporarily halt studies until research operations return to Level 1 as designated by the Vice Chancellor for Research.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

If YES, please proceed to Question 4.

**4. Briefly describe the research activities that need to continue, and provide a plan to ensure social distancing (i.e., 6 ft perimeter from other humans during work), surface and equipment sanitizing, and other recommended measures to mitigate risk of COVID-19 exposure and transmission. Identify up to 3 trained laboratory or field work members as “essential staff” that will maintain the work/equipment/colony/etc. Describe additional mitigation plans to ensure safe and responsible conduct of the research during this limited access (if granted). Finally, acknowledge that there could be additional disruptions to other campus and non-campus services that could further disrupt your mitigation plan, and that you will update this plan regularly if such circumstances arise.**

*[Feel free to expand this field or attach a document/plan]*

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Research Operation Approvals for  
Level 2 Plan, Level 3 Plan, or Level 4 Plan  
Administrative Signatures**

**Level 2 Plan Authorization:**

Department Head or Director:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Vice Chancellor for Research:

Beverly K. Hartline Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Level 3 Plan Authorization:**

Department Head or Director:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Vice Chancellor for Research:

Beverly K. Hartline Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Level 4 Plan Authorization:**

Department Head or Director:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Vice Chancellor for Research:

Beverly K. Hartline Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_