

Procedures for Field Research and Boating with COVID-19 Impacts

The intent of this standard operating procedure (SOP) is to minimize the risk of COVID-19 disease transmission and protect the health and safety of personnel conducting research activities at field sites. Failure to follow this SOP may result in suspension of field research.

A Research Operation Plan should be prepared by the Research Group Leader and approved by the department chair (or unit manager). The field research action plan should describe any deviations from this SOP and what safety measures are being implemented.

1. The approved field Research Operation Plan must be reviewed by all participants in the research.
 - a. The research plan and associated documents and work logs should be maintained in a shared space (i.e., Microsoft Teams).
2. Faculty, students, technicians and other staff must not be compelled to engage in travel or research activities that they are not comfortable with. The UToledo faculty researcher will inform their staff that they have the right to refuse to engage in activities that could expose them to the public and obtain positive consent of their willingness to assume the risks involved.

Research members should contact The Environmental Health and Radiation Safety Department if they have safety concerns (<https://www.utoledo.edu/depts/safety/docs/S-08-030.pdf>).

3. Field Research Operation Plan must include:
 - a. List of all personnel, their contact information and an emergency contact.
 - b. Justification as to why delaying the research will have a detrimental impact on the research project or the student's progression towards a degree that are engaged in the research.
 - c. Description of the research activities and what precautions are being undertaken to limit potential disease transmission (i.e., personal protective equipment, social distancing).
 - d. Contingency plan for carrying on research if one or more personnel becomes sick or is no longer willing to risk conducting the research.
4. Research being conducted at non-UToledo sites must have written permission for the field work to proceed from those that control access to the field site and the funding agency.
5. If non-UToledo agencies or research partners are actively engaged in the research, the research should be engaged using the guidelines that are the most stringent unless expressly permitted by the partner agencies.
6. Before conducting research each day, all UToledo participants in the research project must measure their body temperatures.
7. No one should participate in field work if they are feeling ill, have a temperature of >100 degrees Fahrenheit or if any members of their household are experiencing COVID-19 or flu-like symptoms.
8. A log of each day's activities should be recorded in a shared folder (i.e. Microsoft Teams)
 - a. This log will include locations sampled, public or private venues accessed or visited, personnel in attendance, and any operation anomalies that may have occurred requiring assistance from persons outside the field crew (e.g. mechanical issues).

9. If traveling out of state, express permission must be granted by the College Deans. If permitted to travel, register your travel plans here: <https://www.utoledo.edu/cisp/webforms/voluntary-travel-registry.html>
 - a. If traveling long distances, stops should only be made for fuel and restrooms. Sanitize hands after these activities.
10. No more than two people may occupy a vehicle to, from, and at the work site. Masks (i.e., cloth face coverings) are to be worn in vehicles when there are two people. If possible, travel with windows open. High touch areas (e.g., truck keys, door handles and steering wheel) must be disinfected before and after the field day.
11. If boats are to be used, each boat will have a maximum number of total personnel allowed on the vessel at any time. Outboard vessels that are 21 feet or less will be limited to crews of two. Vessels over 21 feet but less than 27 feet will be limited to a crew of three. Vessels larger than 27 feet will be limited to crews of four.
12. During field tasks, it is recommend that masks be worn at all times, but required when conducting tasks that require interacting at less than 6 feet.
 - a. The level and timing of disinfecting between uses of equipment should be determined by the crew. For some it may make sense to clean after each use, but for other crews it may be understood that the risk of exposure is a daily risk not an individual encounter risk.
13. All crew members should bring ample water/liquids and food for themselves in clearly labelled bottles and containers. No sharing of drinks or food will be allowed.
14. Upon the completion of the research all equipment must be disinfected.
15. Remote work that requires lodging and/or long-term stays.
 - a. Remote field work changes the risks of exposure to COVID-19 in positive and negative ways. Traveling to a remote work site often brings individuals from multiple locations to the same location enhancing risk when people arrive but limits external exposure after arrival.
 - b. Individuals planning to participate in remote work, should self-quarantine as much as possible before traveling to the remote site.
 - c. Field crews should establish protocols to socially isolate individuals, pairs, and groups in a hierarchical fashion. For example, if individuals have to share sleeping quarters, other daily activities should be arranged to maximize these interactions such as scheduled eating times, riding in vehicles, etc.
 - d. Purchasing of food, supplies and contact with society outside the field crew should be limited to as few individual interactions as possible.
 - e. If a member of the field crew presents COVID-19 or flu-like symptoms the following steps are required:
 - i. The individual must cease field work and self-quarantine. Contingency funds for a separate hotel room or other measures must be considered by the PI before research begins.
 - ii. Consult with your physician or medical provider as necessary.
 - iii. The remainder of the crew may continue their work but must make extra efforts to isolate the crew from external sources.
 - iv. The individual should self-quarantine for 14 days, unless they test negative for COVID-19 or have been approved to return to work / research activities by their health care provider.