

U-M research re-engagement planning amid COVID-19

This message was sent on May 7, 2020, to the U-M research community (faculty and research staff with active sponsored research). Please share this information with your colleagues.

Dear faculty and research staff,

Seven weeks ago, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the University of Michigan to ramp down noncritical laboratory research activities. This decision was difficult, but necessary in order to protect our employees, students and the communities we live in.

In less than a week, the U-M research community rapidly responded to the pandemic, shifting and pausing important research and scholarship efforts. Together, through these collective actions, we have begun to flatten the curve, and we now turn our attention to how we may begin to re-engage research in a public health-informed manner when conditions allow.

Some economic sectors within our state are now beginning to reopen, and so a Research Ramp-up Committee is working to solidify re-engagement plans over the next several weeks so that the U-M community is prepared and ready for when the State of Michigan authorizes the limited reopening of laboratory research. This new committee includes representation from Research Associate Deans, the Department of Environment, Health and Safety, U-M's Chief Health Officer, the Provost's Office, and the Rackham Graduate School, and they are informed and benchmarked across peer institutions and national organizations.

COVID-19 has impacted nearly every facet of our research enterprise, and so the university plans to implement a phased approach to ramp up research activity when allowed to do so.

Please note that we are still in the planning stages, and any future decisions involving research re-engagement will be adjusted to adhere to state guidelines.

Experimental laboratory research/Studio-based research/Locally based field research

This first phase of research re-engagement will apply only to those individuals involved in experimental laboratory research and studio-based research, along with some locally based, non-human subjects field research. We will follow up accordingly once a timeline for the first phase of research re-engagement is solidified, understanding this may occur as early as mid- to late-May, or be extended into June.

It is important to note that research and scholarship that can occur remotely will continue to do so. Buildings that are not open for laboratory/studio-based research remain restricted to critical approved personnel only. Buildings that will open to laboratory/studio-based research will not yet be open to other activities beyond the approved research and critical approved activities in the buildings.

Guidelines and plans for how we can safely re-engage research amid COVID-19 are provided on our [new Research Re-engagement webpage](#), which covers important details such as entry to laboratory/studio buildings and how many individuals can safely occupy research spaces. Individuals who are authorized by their school/college/unit to resume research operations during this first re-engagement phase will be provided a cloth mask, as well as instructions on cleaning and maintenance. While these new procedures will force us all to adjust our normal research operations, they are important and necessary actions to protect health and safety.

Research and scholarship varies greatly across our schools, colleges and units, and so we are working closely with research leadership in your respective areas to ensure we can safely and effectively re-engage some research activity. This includes the development of safety checklists and research re-engagement request forms, among other materials.

Schools, colleges and units are developing research re-engagement plans that are specific to their areas, and so you should be receiving additional information from your research leadership in the coming week. Please refer to our [COVID-19 Research Operations webpage](#) for updated FAQs as it relates to research re-engagement planning.

In-person human subjects research

During this first phase of research re-engagement, the university will maintain its current restrictions on in-person human subjects research. Studies with investigational treatments, such as drugs and devices or stabilization of high-risk psychological conditions, that provide the potential for direct therapeutic benefit that were previously approved should continue.

For access to resources that support remote-based human subjects research, please refer to our new "[starter toolkit](#)."

We will continue to assess the rapidly changing COVID-19 situation to determine the university's approach moving forward, and it is important to remember the planning you do now will support the long-term success of the U-M research enterprise, including our fall academic semester. Research leadership from across the university also plans to host a virtual town hall in the coming weeks to answer questions and provide guidance on research re-engagement planning amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research and scholarship will operate much differently in the months ahead, but I remain confident that the generation of new knowledge will play a critical role as we work to find solutions to this pandemic. A prime example of how our research community has transitioned its efforts toward the novel coronavirus is reflected in our [COVID-19 Research Index](#), which now features more than 200 COVID-related projects.

Our researchers are leading clinical trials to identify potential treatments for COVID-19. They are developing advances to personal protective equipment to ensure the health and safety of our clinicians. And in accordance with the university's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, researchers have played an important role in exploring how COVID-19 has exacerbated the health inequalities that exist within our communities.

As impressive as this COVID-related research is, I recognize that our research unrelated to COVID-19 is also vitally important and critical to our long-term mission. Our path toward re-engaging our full research enterprise will be a gradual one, but with your ongoing support and expertise, U-M will continue to play a critical role in serving the world through research and scholarship.

Please stay safe and healthy.

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