

## DEPARTMENT COVID-19 UPDATE #17 - May 25, 2020

*Message sent on behalf of Margaret McKinnon, Associate Chair, Research, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences*

### RESEARCH

#### Phase 1 Re-opening Information

#### What is meant by "Phase 1" of the re-opening process?

During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, McMaster will be hosting research across its main and affiliated (e.g., SJHH; HHS) campuses in four phases. At the onset of the pandemic, we moved into Phase 0, where only those research activities deemed essential (e.g., care and safety of animals) and/ or related to COVID-19 research were allowed on campus; the distributed hospitals implemented this phase simultaneously. **At present, we remain in Phase 0.**

We are, however, preparing to enter Phase 1 of the gradual re-opening of the main and affiliated campus to some research activities. This phase follows recently issued provincial guidelines on re-opening. Researchers and research teams are expected to be able to transition quickly back to Phase 0 activities should a second wave of the pandemic occur.

A Phase 1 return to research means that only those research activities that: i) require campus-based equipment and facilities; or ii) pertain to situations where an inability to conduct fieldwork would present serious obstacles and consequences for graduate students and researchers completing their studies will be allowed on campus, including the hospital sites. More information about Phase 1 and FAQs can be found on the Office of the VPR's [COVID-19 website](#).

#### Are any additional details available?

Our understanding, based on conversations with Jonathan Bramson, Associate Dean Research in the Faculty of Health Sciences, is that researchers will be allowed on campus to collect their data, and to perform tasks that can only be done within the laboratory setting. **Face-to-face contacts with research participants are not allowed at this time, although they may continue on-line following REB approval.**

When requests to re-enter the laboratory setting are made, they will be considered carefully with respect to the ability to maintain physical/social distancing requirements. **Accordingly, researchers are asked to limit the number of individuals requested to the minimum required to conduct the research.** It is notable here that requests will be considered not only in relation to individual laboratories, but also in relation to a building or location as a whole, and the overall need to consider traffic in hallways, restrooms, etc.

Phase 1 will allow a limited number of research personnel to access campus for research that cannot be undertaken in a remote manner. This phase does not signal a return of researchers to

campus for any other reason. No individual is permitted to come to campus to take part in activities that include (but are not limited to) regular office work, group or individual meetings, literature reviews, paper writing, grant preparation, thesis defences, comprehensive exams, etc. Trained undergraduates and graduate students will be permitted to work on approved research projects but “hands on” training of such individuals is not permitted.

### **My research takes place in a hospital setting, at MIP, or in the Central Animal Facility. What should I do?**

You are still required to request approval from McMaster before returning to your lab. Once granted approval, you must respect and follow all protocols and directives defined by the respective partner hospital, MIP, or the CAF. We have been advised that requests to perform Phase 1 research activities at SJHH or HHS will require **additional** approval from Jack Gaudie or Ted Scott, respectively, as the VPs Research at these facilities. The process for securing these approvals has not yet been announced and we will update the Research Community as soon as we have this information. We are, however, aware that the Research Institute at St. Joe's is receiving copies of any requests submitted to FHS and is currently determining how to best move forward with these applications given unique hospital circumstances. We have also reached out to HHS for additional information and are awaiting a response.

**Researchers are reminded that no research can take place on any hospital premises (e.g., SJHH; HHS) until specific approval from these institutions has been received. This approval is in addition to any approval that has been received from McMaster.**

There will also be an **additional, separate process** to apply for access to the CAF, which will consider carefully the overall amount of traffic in the facility.

### **Even if I'm eligible, do I have to return to work in Phase 1?**

McMaster advises absolutely not. No researcher, nor any member of a research team, should feel compelled to return to their lab or conduct fieldwork. Returning is completely voluntary and the sole choice of the individual. In fact, working from home continues to remain the preference, although we recognize that some research cannot be completed without access to on-campus infrastructure or facilities. Mechanisms are in place for individuals feeling pressured to return to a laboratory setting to speak confidentially to Jonathan Bramson, Associate Dean, Research, FHS or Karen Mossman, Vice President Research. These individuals may also reach out, confidentially, to Nick Kates ([nkates@mcmaster.ca](mailto:nkates@mcmaster.ca)) or Margaret McKinnon ([mmkinno@stjosham.on.ca](mailto:mmkinno@stjosham.on.ca)) at any time for support and assistance.

### **Can I impose stricter health and safety measures than the University?**

All researchers must abide by the University's [health and safety measures](#) (also reference the [Ontario Framework](#)) at a minimum. If you feel that additional measures are required to ensure the safety of your research team, such measures should be considered in consultation with [EOHSS](#) or [FHSSO](#).

At present, McMaster does not **require** the use of masks on the central campus but individuals are free to wear their own masks at any time. If research activities require a mask or PPE be worn, the primary investigator must provide these to staff and students. The primary investigator must also provide instruction on the proper donning and doffing of masks, and their storage between uses.

Additional information about masks is available through [Public Health Ontario](#). McMaster's guidelines about the use of masks on the **University campus** can be found [here](#).

If research activities require a mask or PPE be worn, the primary investigator must provide these to staff and students (please note that anyone entering SJHH and HHS will receive a mask at the time of entry). The primary investigator must also provide instruction on the proper donning and doffing of masks, and their storage between uses.

SJHH has provided the [following information](#) about proper mask usage.

Currently, all individuals entering our Hamilton hospitals do so through a central access point, and receive a non-surgical mask at the time of entry.

Masks do not eliminate the need for physical distancing practices or hand hygiene.

### **What is the process for applying for a Phase 1 return to research and what sort of details are needed?**

Researchers, including those previously approved through the earlier “exemption for essential research” process, will complete an [online form](#) that includes plans for their proposed on-campus research. Approval must be received from the Department Chair and/or Associate Dean Research (ADR), **and confirmation from the University that the campus is now open for a phased increase of research**, before any activity takes place. Plans will adhere to the policies outlined in McMaster’s [Workplace Health and Safety Guidance](#) and, for research taking place on the premises of our hospital partners or at McMaster Innovation Park, the policies of that institution. Each principal investigator will need to work with all research personnel in their labs to review those policies and guidelines and to establish appropriate protocols that are relevant to their particular research environment. Once submitted, the plan will move forward for review by the Department Chair and/or ADR. Researchers will receive an email once the review is complete, letting them know of the outcome. This may take a few days.

The online form will ask researchers to provide:

- A brief rationale for why the research must be conducted on campus rather than remotely
- The building(s), floors, rooms for which access is requested. While the number of personnel working in each room will need to comply with social distancing guidelines, understanding consolidated plans for personnel within buildings will allow the university to better plan for such things as traffic flows, elevator access, cleaning, etc.

- Names of research personnel who will require access at this time (NOTE: research is limited to the fewest number of personnel required to conduct the work)
- Plans for meeting the guidelines for hygiene and physical distancing as described in “Adjust the Workplace” in the [Workplace Health and Safety Guidance](#) (e.g. by minimizing numbers of people in labs and/or scheduling on-campus activities into shifts)
- Researchers will be asked to confirm:
  - that McMaster’s pandemic-specific [Workplace Health and Safety Guidance](#) guidelines are understood and will be followed by all members of the research team
  - that no research will involve face-to-face human participants
  - that they have plans for a safe and as rapid as possible shutdown are in place, should they be called for by the University and/or Public Health officials

**Is there any Faculty of Health Science specific guidance for completing this form and making a plan for a return to research?**

Yes. Jonathan Bramson drafted the following guidance late last week. He advises research teams to:

Develop a research plan for each room that your staff will use. This includes common spaces (for example: equipment rooms). In your plan, you will need to indicate how you will manage physical distancing in each of these rooms. You are encouraged to work with neighbouring labs to harmonize your plans.

Remember that masking is not a replacement for physical distancing. Please ensure that your staff have enough room in the workspace to maintain a six-foot distance. As blind corners and tight passes within the workspace may not allow for physical distancing at all times, you will need to ensure that everyone on site has a mask that can be worn during brief periods where physical distancing cannot be maintained.

Masks are available at HSC Stores. Please ensure that your staff are trained in proper donning and doffing procedures for masks.

Reconfigure your research space as needed to maximize social distancing. Consider the locations of fridges, freezers, centrifuges, etc.

Consider a floor plan to designate spaces where work can be performed in your research area. Floor plans for the entire campus are available [here](#).

Consider signage and/or floor markings to assist with physical distancing. The University is preparing standard signs which you will be able to order for spaces that your team will use.

Due to blind corners and limited space in hallways, masks are advised for transit through the hallways as you cannot predict who else is traveling through the halls.

If your research space is located in one of the hospitals, universal masking is mandatory.

Masks may be easily reused safely. [Here is a good method](#).

Develop a cleaning schedule to ensure that all work areas are wiped down before/after working with 70% ethanol.

Consider getting latex keyboard covers for all common computers to facilitate cleaning.

Please have your lab members notify you when they arrive on campus and when they leave. This can be done via e-mail, text, WhatsApp, Microsoft Teams or any number of social media platforms.

As your staff will likely be working in shifts, use a calendar for all research spaces to enable your staff to organize their time. Staff should book time in advance and respect existing bookings. The goal of the calendar is to ensure that no one comes to campus only to find out that there is no space for them. There are several good options for group calendars, including Microsoft Team, Google Calendar, and Faces.

Identify the locations where your staff can take breaks as needed. If possible, develop plans with neighbouring labs to stagger break times and limit mustering in common areas.

Consider making thermometers and digital pulse oximeters available for your staff to monitor their own health. They are not obliged to take these measurements but may find access to the instruments useful.

Jonathan also notes that each research area will have unique challenges. If you run into problems dealing with those challenges, feel free to reach out to him ([bramsonj@mcmaster.ca](mailto:bramsonj@mcmaster.ca)) or to Tracy Arabski ([arabski@mcmaster.ca](mailto:arabski@mcmaster.ca)).

### When will we move to Phase 2 and 3 of the return to on-campus research?

Phases 2 and 3 are in large part aligned with Stages 2 and 3 of "[A Framework for Reopening our Province](#)." Dates will be determined by the President and Vice-Presidents and announced by the (acting) Vice-President Research. More detailed instructions on those phases will be made available before specific dates are announced. McMaster personnel undertaking research at any of our partner hospitals or at MIP will follow the directives of that institution. McMaster's entry into Phase 2 will be dependent on an assessment of the success of Phase 1. Remote working remains the preferred method but managed, staggered laboratory/office access will be allowed for faculty, PhDs and graduate students (with physical/social distancing, hygiene practices, and (re)established maximum occupancies). Similarly, McMaster's entry into Phase 3 will be dependent on an assessment of the success of Phase 2. Continuing return with relaxation of staggered occupancy of space and increased opportunity for involvement of untrained undergraduate and graduate students is anticipated.

Kind regards,  
Margaret