



COVID-19 PROTECTION IN RESEARCH: SUB-STAGE 1 REOPENING GUIDANCE

Effective Date: May 15, 2020

The information contained in this document reflects and is informed by current federal, state, and local laws, regulations and guidance. As information pertaining to protection against the spread of COVID-19 changes, updates to this Northeastern University guidance will be posted here.

Note: No individual should come to campus if sick or experiencing any symptoms associated with COVID-19

PURPOSE

In conjunction with current federal and state laws and regulations, and guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as well as advisories from the mayor of the city of Boston, and governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, this document has been developed to provide general guidelines associated with physical distance planning. These guidelines, and any policies and protocols referenced below, are subject to modification and revision by the university and consistent with federal, state and local requirements and guidance.

This document does not replace or change preexisting safety requirements or approved lab safety plans associated with operational tasks, administrative tasks, research activities, and other activities performed by employees and students on campus.

For questions involving federal, state, and local requirements associated with your Northeastern work and/or activities, in addition to questions concerning methods to prevent the spread of and exposure to COVID-19, please contact the Office of Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) at 617.373.2769 or ehs@northeastern.edu

WHAT WE UNDERSTAND ABOUT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 AT THIS TIME

The virus is thought to spread between people who are in the breathing zone with one another (within a 6-foot diameter) and through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. ***However, the information on COVID-19 spread is changing often with current evidence showing that exposure may occur through contact with people who are infected but asymptomatic and are within your breathing zone even without coughing and sneezing symptoms.***

It is extremely important to recognize that, in addition to close contact with any person, **exposure may occur from touching contaminated surfaces and objects and then touching your face.**



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The latest CDC information on COVID-19 is available [here](#).

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE) vs PUBLIC HEALTH PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PHPE)

It is important to recognize the difference between PPE and PHPE when reading the guidelines below.

1. PPE includes regulated equipment designed and manufactured to specific standards and meant to protect the wearer (employee/researcher). E.g. an N95 respirator is PPE designed and tested to filter particles to prevent inhalation by the wearer in accordance with a set of measured standards.
2. PHPE protects the public. It includes nonregulated equipment recommended by federal, state, and local governments to prevent the spread of disease. PHPE's primary purpose is **not** to protect you, the person wearing it, but to protect people around you by catching your exhaled aerosols and droplets before they encounter other people or surfaces. However, there is also value to the person wearing PHPE as PHPE can reduce the spread of COVID-19 within the Northeastern community. Reducing disease spread is protection for all.
 - a. Nonregulated disposable face masks and cloth facial coverings are PHPE. Facial coverings should be used even when physical distancing can be maintained between researchers.
 - b. All facial coverings help by catching larger, exhaled droplets.

GENERAL COVID-19 Physical Distancing Plan

The most important first step toward ensuring the safety, health and well-being of everyone involved in research is to develop a location-specific Physical Distancing Plan with your supervisor and colleagues who perform activities in the same location. Space-specific physical distancing plan details are to be included in the appropriate section of the [Research Resumption Application](#). Additional guidance on developing a physical distancing plan is available [here](#).

Further details concerning safety, health, and well-being protocols and requirements for physically returning to campus will be forwarded to you in a separate communication.

EMPLOYEE QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

Employees may have questions or concerns about returning to campus or field locations for research. If you have an employee who is expressing concern about returning to campus or field research you should consult [Alexis Harding](#), the Senior Human Resources Business Partner or [Shana Feggins](#) in Human Resources Management for guidance on how to proceed.

OPT-OUT POLICY FOR STUDENTS

At this time, the university is allowing individuals who are not comfortable with participating with on-campus research or field research activities to opt out of that research and continue to conduct activities remotely if possible. Retaliation against individuals who request to opt out of on-campus or field research activities is strictly prohibited. The university is continually assessing developments during the COVID-19 crisis in conjunction with federal, state,

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and local guidelines and the policy allowing individuals to opt out of campus or field-based research may change and evolve over time.

Students with concerns involving return to on-campus research or field research should discuss options with their PI and thesis advisor. Students should not be pressured to resume on-campus or field activities under the opt-out policy and should consult their College's associate dean for graduate affairs in the first instance for assistance and support if needed. In addition, any researcher who believes they are being pressured to participate in on-campus or field activities can file a report with the Associate Vice Provost for Education and Research Safety, [Marne Smith](#).

MONITOR FEDERAL, STATE, LOCAL, AND NORTHEASTERN COVID-19 UPDATES.

Stay Informed! The most effective way to reduce exposure to COVID-19 is to stay informed. Follow the most up-to-date information available from [Northeastern's COVID-19 site](#) in addition to the federal, state, and local authorities.

- a. [CDC – Centers for Disease Control](#)
- b. [OSHA Guidance on Preparing Workplaces](#)
- c. [Massachusetts Department of Public Health Guidelines](#)
- d. [Northeastern University Office of Environmental Health and Safety](#)
- a. [Northeastern University's Global Resilience Institute](#) training program: [Covid-19: How to be Safe and Resilient](#)

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH

1. Research involving human subjects should be performed remotely whenever possible. If research involving human subjects is approved and will be conducted in campus labs, specific safety measures must be taken with focus on supporting physical distancing as well as use of facial coverings and other PHPE as needed.

As noted above, a **lab-specific physical distancing plan** must be developed and sent for review as a part of the research resumption application process. For assistance developing a plan, please contact the [EH&S Office](#).

2. For consenting or outfitting a participant with sensors, only one lab member should interact with the participant, with both individuals wearing proper PHPE, and if possible, a protective shield between the two.
3. All lab equipment, sensors, surfaces, and supplies (pens, keyboards) should be wiped down with a university-supplied disinfectant before and after each experiment.
4. Schedule each experiment in a manner that *minimizes* overlap between subjects in the lab and any adjacent labs, in order to reduce the density of people in the area and to allow time for cleaning the equipment and surfaces. People taking part in research who self-identify as being vulnerable to severe illness from COVID-19 should not be brought to campus.
5. All human subject research activities must be in full compliance with local and national public health guidance and must be fully approved by and compliant with the guidance of the Northeastern Institutional Review Board (IRB).

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Research involving human subjects in the community must be conducted in full compliance with local and national public health guidance. In addition, all research involving human subjects must be fully approved and compliant with the guidance of the Northeastern IRB and compliant with partner COVID-19 policies.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FIELD RESEARCH

Many research groups conduct field research, which we operationally define as activities occurring outdoors and in non-university buildings (excluding work from home). Examples include surveying an ecosystem, observing the behavior of people or systems outside (e.g., traffic), conducting SCUBA or snorkeling surveys, installing or maintaining sensors in natural ecosystems or on infrastructure, working from a boat, deploying and operating aerial drones, collecting architectural data, or installing or maintaining an outdoor art installation.

If research will take place off-campus including in non-university buildings, a [Research Resumption Application](#) must be completed and include a physical distancing plan. The plan must follow Northeastern COVID-19 protection requirements as well as applicable requirements associated with the non-university location.

In addition to completing all Sub-Stage 1 activities, other protection measures for field research include, but are not limited to:

1. Making plans for personnel traveling separately to field locations, wearing gloves if objects need to be touched by multiple persons, and wearing proper face coverings.
2. Obtaining all necessary approvals to perform on-site work from applicable authorities and / or site owners.
3. Working from a boat requires details on deck and cabin space layout and descriptions of how physical distancing can be achieved during travel time on the water, as well as during activities on site, and how marine head use will be managed and disinfected.
4. Occasionally, field work requests may require your team to stay overnight. In those cases, details for achieving protections during overnight stays must be included in your physical distancing plan.
5. At this time, Northeastern's policy on air travel has not changed. This guidance and your response are for field sites reachable by private automobile.

PROCUREMENT OF NECESSARY FACE MASKS, CLOTH FACE COVERINGS, HYGIENE SUPPLIES, AND DISINFECTANTS

In order to obtain supplies to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread, follow the procedure outlined [here](#). On average, a week lead time is needed to obtain and deliver PPE, PHPE, and COVID-19 supplies, so please plan accordingly.