SUNY and RF Research Restarting:

Guidelines and Resources

June 8, 2020

Introduction

The State University of New York (SUNY) and the Research Foundation for SUNY (RF) convened a task force to establish high-level guidelines and resources to inform the process of resuming research activities on SUNY campuses in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic shut down.

The task force sought not to duplicate campus efforts, but rather to focus on:
1. Sharing best practices across campuses;
2. Addressing relevant HR and policy issues; and,
3. Coordinating SUNY-wide communication for re-opening research.

The goal of this document is to ensure safe, streamlined re-opening of research activities, while mitigating the risk of spreading the coronavirus and preventing a potential "second wave" of infections.

Key Principles

- Follow the overall guidance of New York State (NYS), SUNY, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and each individual campus to resume research activities. The research administrators and researchers should NOT establish guidelines that contradict the guidelines from NYS, SUNY, CDC, and the campus.
- Resume research activities as public health conditions and campus resources permit. A phased and gradual re-opening is highly encouraged.
- Protect the health and safety of personnel (emotional as well as physical).
- Consider the unique needs and circumstances of the academic research community, including clinical and clinical trial research, hospitals, remote locations, field research, incubators and industry partnership activities.
- Consider the careers and unique needs of early-career researchers.
- Implement a fair and transparent process for granting access and working remotely.
- Continue to ensure research compliance.
- Protect the health and safety of clinical patients and human research subjects.

People

Testing and Screening

Deciding When and How to Re-open
- NYS Governor Andrew Cuomo has provided a [dashboard](#) for regional re-opening. Reopening must be consistent with all applicable government mandated requirements.
- Refer to the [CDC decision tree](#) for re-opening to assist in decision making.

Testing and Health Screening
Employees will likely be required to undergo a health screening before or when they report onsite. Symptomatic employees will be asked to remain home, contact their personal healthcare provider, and notify their manager.
- The RF will follow SUNY's guidance on testing protocols.
- The NYS Department of Health (DOH) has a [self-assessment tool](#) that identifies symptoms such as fever over 100°, shortness of breath, dry cough, sore throat and/or runny nose.
- The CDC has also created a [self-assessment tool](#).

Communication
- Communicate frequently with employees and have Employee Assistance Program (EAP) information widely available.
- Town hall meetings with faculty, students and staff have been very effective in communicating the transition to research restarting.
- Campuses should develop and share safety plans and research restarting documents across the enterprise.
- Campuses may require Principal Investigators (PIs) to sign a compliance document acknowledging they have read the guidelines. See sample compliance document [here](#).

Relevant HR Policies

RF Salary and Benefits Continuation Policy
In March 2020, the RF established a [policy](#) to allow employees who were unable to work remotely, or to be reassigned, to be paid for 30 days and to extend health benefits at the employees' cost for 60 days.

- **Guidance from the New York State Division of Budget -** Budget bulletins ([B-1182 Revised](#) & [B-1223](#)) provide guidance to campuses on issues related to salary transactions, travel and procurement.
- **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Guidance –** In May 2020, the EEOC issued [guidance](#) on permissible employer conduct as employees transition back to the workplace.
- Additional resources: [COVID-19 Learning & Development Resources](#)

Restarting Research Activities

Research Labs and Office Preparedness

- Continue remote working arrangements when possible and ease workers back into their routines.
- Follow the NYS [guidelines for face coverings](#) and other non-pharmaceutical protective measures.
- Campuses should establish a transparent granting process to establish the staggered re-opening schedule. A sample form is [here](#).
- Adopt social distancing practices for faculty, students and staff in research labs and office spaces. The following practices are recommended:
  - Rearrange schedules (e.g., shifts, assigned days, etc.) to reduce density.
  - Minimize the number of people in each lab. If, for safety reasons, working alone is not permitted in a lab, a distance of at least 6 feet must be maintained between each person occupying the space.
  - Minimize in-person meetings by utilizing video- or tele-conferences when possible.
  - Reduce the number of days each researcher must be on-campus by conducting remotely activities that do not require presence in a lab (e.g., data analysis, literature searches, writing, or research meetings).
  - One-way aisles and plexiglass barriers are suggested.
- Keep lab and office areas organized to make it easier for regular cleaning.
- Clean lab and office areas, particularly the shared spaces and equipment including benches, desks, chairs, keyboards, phones, etc., regularly by following CDC and NYS DOH guidelines.
- Cleaning supplies should be provided to all returning employees. Robust sanitizing schedules are required for all workspaces.

Off-Campus Research

- Modify protocols to conduct research online whenever possible.
- It is strongly recommended that only one person at a time travel in a vehicle, and if multiple people require transportation, multiple vehicles must be used. However, in cases where this is impossible, [guidance from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Division of Water (DOW)](#) will be used for transport in a fashion similar to the Governor's orders for facial coverings when social distancing cannot be maintained.
- In addition to the terms and guidance set forth by the campus, follow the safety guidelines issued by the external entity, when applicable (e.g., schools, community centers, hospitals).
- Bringing lab equipment and instruments, chemicals and materials, and computing systems off campus or outside the United States (US) is not allowed. This document does not cover non-research activities such as loaning machines to local hospitals for COVID-19 testing.
- Faculty, staff and students outside of the US that cannot return due to the pandemic, review and approval must be done before sponsored research may be conducted beyond US borders. If proper approvals were not obtained, contact campus export control and the

sponsored program office for guidance. For federally sponsored research projects, a proper request must be sent to the federal sponsor for approval.

Field Research

To resume field research, safety processes must be strictly followed. If a previously approved protocol requires modification to address the safety procedures related to COVID-19 (e.g., adjustment in location, addition or removal of a procedure), an amendment must be submitted and approved before the research can commence.

- All relevant trainings and permissions (e.g., IACUC, first aid, trapping permits, consent from landowners) must be in place before initiating any travel to field sites.
- Researchers and staff with any COVID-19 symptoms must stay home, report their illness to their PI and/or other cognizant campus officials, contact their primary care provider, and not return to work until the PI advises it is appropriate.
- The PI should provide the necessary and appropriate safety equipment and PPE to all research team members.
- The PI should prepare and provide a written safety plan with standard operating procedures (SOPs) including contingency plans in the event that a team member becomes symptomatic for COVID-19 in the field. The team should follow local, regional and federal guidelines for isolation or quarantine. The safety plan must include the following: general hygiene, general disinfecting (e.g., shared equipment/gear use), proper use of PPE, lodging and shared space protocols (e.g., use of kitchens, bathrooms), food and supplies procurement protocols, emergency actions, training, social distancing, and healthcare.
- The PI is to maintain a daily log of project activities and check-in and check-out schedules.
- Individuals must maintain social distancing, with separation of at least 6 feet, to the maximum extent possible during research activities.
- The PI should prepare a communication plan should any issues or emergencies arise. The plan is to include the nearest health clinic to the field location with phone numbers, hours of operation, etc. In addition, contact information of the research team members and their emergency contacts, and key university contacts (e.g., EH&S, OH&S, IACUC Chair, AV) must be included in the plan. This plan must be distributed to all research team members.
- All research team members must have ample water/liquids and food for themselves in clearly labeled bottles and containers. No sharing of drinks or food is allowed.
- Vehicles to be used to and from the field site, as well as those used on-site, should adhere to only one person per vehicle when can be safely accommodated. Otherwise, facial coverings must be worn by passengers when social distancing is not possible (See guidance from NYS DEC DOW)
- If traveling long distances, stops should only be made for fuel and restrooms. Face coverings are to be worn outside of the vehicle and hands are to be sanitized after these activities.
- Sample fieldwork review and approval form, and sample fieldwork screening questionnaire.

Refer to the Research Compliance section of this document for human subjects and animal research activities.

Financial Management and Sponsored Programs

Critical and essential research on the campuses requires support for faculty developing and submitting proposals, and for their on-going management of sponsored programs. Therefore, financial management and sponsored program support services have been provided remotely without disruption since *New York State on Pause* went into effect.

- As sponsored programs resume, we anticipate an even greater need to respond quickly to allowability, procurement, and other questions from researchers. To meet this need, the RF will form a temporary Sponsored Program Management Council (SPMC) to address questions and build an FAQ page that will be posted on the RF website.
- Researchers may be required to work in shifts to keep the campus population and lab density low. To support programs that will re-open, campuses may consider expanding daily operating hours of sponsored program services, if needed.
- Campuses should develop reporting tools to assess the impact of COVID-19 on expenditures, analyze trends, and coordinate with PIs and sponsors.
- Request bridge funding from sponsors as activities are delayed or other needs arise, if applicable.
- RF allocates annual F&A returns to the campuses based on forecast in June every year. RF will look into how to make these allocations for FY21, given the uncertainty.
- In collaboration with campuses, RF will monitor the impact of salary continuation, unpaid leave and unemployment on future fringe rates.
- RF Central and campuses must monitor corporate and campus cash balances and risk tolerance carefully and diligently.
- The Council on Governmental Relations (COGR) FAQs and Resources on COVID-19's Impact on Federal Awards are found here.

Affiliates, Incubators & Industrial Co-Location

Each company entering SUNY or RF premises is responsible for compliance with SUNY campus policy and directives for activity on campus, all of which should be undertaken with priority given to the health and safety of the campus community.

Below guidelines assume a business is essential, deemed essential, or otherwise empowered to return to operations pursuant to state and local orders and directives. Given the rapidly changing situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, all SUNY partners should frequently check local guidance to maintain compliance, and submit any questions to the point of contact on campus.

- Every private business occupying space in a SUNY and/or RF facility is responsible for the health and safety of its own employees and implementing screening and social distancing procedures supporting the health and safety of the facility's community.
- In preparation for resuming operations on SUNY premises, businesses seeking to re-open must prepare and submit a *COVID-19 Re-Opening Safety Plan* to the program's executive director or local manager of operations for review and approval. The plan follows the [NY Forward Business Re-Opening Safety Plan Template](#) and requires planning for the following:

    I.   People
          a.   Physical Distancing
    II.   Places
          a.   Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
            Note: SUNY and RF are <u>not</u> able to provide PPEs or other supplies for consumption by non-SUNY/RF personnel.
          b.   Hygiene and Cleaning
          c.   Communication
    III.   Process
          a.   Screening
          b.   Contact Tracing and Disinfection of Contaminated Areas

- The SUNY campus officials empowered to make local decisions on re-opening will evaluate each organization's *COVID-19 Re-Opening Safety Plan* to confirm that it includes all required elements, and meets local campus requirements to protect the health and safety of the campus community. This may involve escalating review of any plan to local campus leadership or committees charged with re-opening planning and facilities management.

Research Compliance

Research compliance requirements must be considered and evaluated when resuming SUNY research activities. Research compliance encompasses a number of functional areas and those vary from campus to campus. This document focuses on functional areas that pose the greatest risk to humans, animals, the environment and facility safety, as well as areas that are directly impacted by the COVID-19 research slowdown or stoppage.

Re-opening research requires a focus on people (researchers, students, facilities staff and subjects), places (laboratory and related facilities, public spaces, and the environment), and animals (including those caring for animals and the animal facilities). Campuses should focus on the management of Human Subjects (IRB), Animal Care (IACUC), and Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) and Occupational Health & Safety (OH&S).

Overall Guidelines
- Ensure that all required licenses, approvals and training are up to date.
- Review regulatory compliance and accreditation standards to ensure staff are up to date on all professional/occupational requirements and that facilities meet all appropriate standards.
- Review and follow research protocols and governing documents or approvals from oversight committees including IRB & IACUC.
- Review and follow sponsor requirements and contractual obligations. Ensure that all prospective changes to research are:
    - Approved by the sponsor, if referring to changes in scope, key personnel, or other qualifying situation;
    - Consistent with contractual obligations and regulatory requirements; and,
    - Consistent with approved protocols and oversight committee approvals.
- If a campus does not have a EH&S or OH&S representative on oversight committees, consider adding one.
- Consider how social distancing and other protective measures will impact research and protocols, and ensure that any changes are reviewed and approved as outlined above.
- Consider an approval process for re-opening research to include a checklist of essential review items signed by the PI/Faculty, Departmental Chair, Dean, sponsored program office, IRB staff, IACUC staff, Institutional Official, Research Compliance Officer, EH&S/OH&S official, VPR, and Campus President.

Human Subjects Research

To resume face-to-face research with human participants, all safety processes set forth by the campus should be strictly followed. To promote a safe environment when conducting face-to-face human participant research, consider:

- Whether moving forward with remote procedures is feasible?
- Realistic timeline expectations for necessary approvals and progress monitoring, and reassess safety with respect to those expectations (to determine when to resume in-person procedures if remote procedures are not feasible).
- Assess the benefit to the participant to conduct in-person procedures.
- Follow safety plans for all participants as outlined in this guidance and by the campus.
- If a previously approved protocol requires modifications to address the safety procedures related to COVID-19 (e.g., adjustment in location, addition or removal of an activity, change of subject pool), a modification is to be submitted to campus IRB office and be approved before the research can resume.

The below is recommended best practice for the health and safety of those involved when conducting face-to-face human subject research:

- The PI must assess the status of both the research team members and the research participants with regard to COVID-19 (e.g., have not received a positive diagnosis in the past fourteen days, do not exhibit any symptoms, to the best of their knowledge, have not come in recent close contact with a person that may have COVID-19).
- Schedule one-on-one appointments only.
- Schedule appointment times to avoid overlap/contact with other participants. Holding multiple participants in waiting areas should be avoided.
- Sanitize research areas and equipment between participant engagements (e.g., wipe down tabletops, chairs, computer keyboard/mouse, tablets, pens, body sensor devices).
- Use face coverings at all times and provide face coverings to participants, if necessary. Utilize gloves when contact with the participant is required to conduct the research; ask the participant to bring a pen to sign a consent form, and modify protocols when possible to eliminate the requirement for documentation of consent.
- Practice social distancing (at least 6 feet apart) to the maximum extent possible during the research activities (e.g., interviews, computer activities, observations).
- Wash hands frequently during activities.
- Additional guidelines: Sample IRB approved ambulatory studies, sample clinical research unit guidance and guidance on the continuation of research with human subjects.

Animal Research

- Laboratories must maintain compliance with approved IACUC protocols. Any deviation from such protocols requires additional approval.
- To meet social distancing guidelines, PIs must coordinate with the Laboratory Animal Resources point person/facility administrator to communicate schedules and avoid unnecessary contact between staff and research team members.
- Maintain a daily log of project activities and personnel check-in and check-out schedules to facilitate contact tracing should an outbreak arise.

- To meet social distancing guidelines, PIs should coordinate with their research teams to establish work shifts that recognize the needs of individual projects and personal circumstances.
- Restrict training teams to 2 people wearing PPE with social distancing where possible.
- Sanitizing work surfaces should be an assigned responsibility for all personnel. Provide soap and/or hand sanitizer near sinks and in other prominent locations within the labs, where possible. All personnel must routinely wash hands.
- PIs who share a lab suite should coordinate schedules to ensure equal and staggered access to those spaces.
- Congregations are prohibited under all circumstances in common areas. When passing through or waiting during incubations/testing, conversations must be socially distanced and limited to not more than 2 people.

Environmental Health and Safety in the Laboratory Environment

Social Interventions

	Social Distancing	Do you have a system to keep a minimum of 6 feet between lab workers? It may include: • Allowing few people into the space by varying access periods • Staggered work shifts or ramping up returns • Limiting shared equipment use • Considering hood space and configuration • Staggered use of other equipment
	Hand Washing and Hand Sanitizer	Are sinks designated for hand washing? Is adequate hand soap available at those sinks? Is hand sanitizer available?
	Health Screening	Are you prepared to comply with your institution's screening protocols (e.g., temperature screens and health questions)?
	COVID PPE	Do you have an adequate supply of COVID-related PPE (e.g., face coverings, gloves) that may be beyond your regular PPE? Do they work with your common PPE?
	Access and Security	Review access and security to the laboratory area. Make required changes.
	Common Areas	Are common areas configured and posted to maintain social distance?
	Common Equipment	Has the use of common or shared equipment been minimized? In areas in which that is not realistic, have procedures been put in place to maintain social distancing and to disinfect equipment?
	Cross Training	Have you planned for enough cross training to continue working safely or provide the needed lab coverage should any personnel become sick?

	Lab Work SOPs	Review all SOPs to confirm that the work can be safely completed under current conditions.
	Training	Are all lab personnel adequately trained in: • COVID-19 related practices? • General lab safety? • Specialty training (e.g., radiation safety, blood borne pathogens)? • Lab specific protocols? • Activities documented in the SOPs?

Emergency Protocols

	General Response	Do you understand, and have you trained all personnel, on emergency response protocols, including any recent changes?
	Lab Specific	Have you updated your lab specific emergency response protocols?
	Call Lists	Have you updated and confirmed call lists for all lab personnel and other department personnel?

Laboratory Facilities

	Smoke/fire Detectors, Alarms & Signaling	Confirm that the building system is functioning and up to date with maintenance.
	Fire Sprinklers	Confirm that the building system is functioning and up to date with maintenance.
	Other Fire Suppression Systems	Confirm that the building system is functioning and up to date with maintenance.
	Portable Fire Extinguishers	The tag should indicate that they have been inspected within the last month. Ensure that they are adequate for proposed work.
	Alternate Fire Extinguishing Materials	Make sure that any lab specific alternate fire suppression system or device is functional.
	Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs)	The tag (or other recordkeeping method) should indicate that they have been inspected within the last month. Their green light or ready signal should be visible.
	First Aid Kits	Review contents in lab first aid kits and replace or replenish as necessary.

	Specialty First Aid	Review contents in lab specialty first aid kits (e.g., HF, HCN) and replace or replenish as necessary.
	Spill Control Kits	Review contents in lab spill kits and replace or replenish as necessary.
	Calibrations	Are all calibrations up to date?

Personal Protective Equipment

	Adequacy	Is PPE adequate for planned work?
	Inspections	Have any inspections for PPE (e.g., consideration of expiration dates and storage conditions, SCBA inspections) been made?
	Procedures	Update emergency procedures.

Safety Equipment

	Eye Washes and Safety Showers	Activate under controlled circumstances to assure flow and to remove standing water. Clean any caps. Are they unobstructed?
	General Ventilation	Assure function and adequacy.
	Chemical Fume Hoods	Assure function. Place a chem wipe on the sash. Make sure any alarms are working correctly and any setbacks are correct.
	Biological Safety Cabinets	Assure function and adequacy.
	Cleanrooms	Assure function and adequacy.
	Other Specialty or Local Ventilation	Assure function and adequacy.
	Gas Cabinets	Assure function and adequacy.
	Glove Boxes	Assure function and adequacy. Make sure that all filters are properly attached.
	Water-cooled Equipment	Assure function and adequacy. Check lines.
	Environmental Control Chambers	Assure function and adequacy.

	Vacuum Systems	Assure function and adequacy. Check hoses and traps.
	Autoclaves	Assure function and adequacy.
	Equipment - general	Inspect all key equipment for evidence of wear or damage. Refurbish as necessary.

Chemical and Materials Concerns

	Hazardous Waste Accumulation	Review your hazardous waste satellite accumulation area.
	Chemical Waste Planning	Make sure that you have planned for the management of any chemical waste that is generated. Discard unwanted chemicals.
	Unstable Chemicals	Review inventory for any chemicals that are or may become unstable on standing (e.g., peroxide formers). Handle appropriately.
	Flammable Storage Areas	Review areas for any deficiencies.
	Other High Hazard Storage Areas	Review areas for any deficiencies.
	Chemical Management	Update inventory and Safety Data Sheet access.
	Monitoring Systems (e.g., chemical alarms)	Review systems for any deficiencies or necessary maintenance.
	Materials - General	Are current materials adequate for labs and not expired or contaminated?
	Chemicals - General	Review all stored materials looking for container damage, expirations, and unusual appearance.