REB Guidance and New Procedure During COVID-19 Outbreak

In light of the COVID-19 outbreak, the university has cancelled all research activities involving face-to-face interactions with members of the public from March 16, 2020 until April 30, 2020. In some settings, in-person interactions can be replaced with telephone or online communications. Considerations include the nature of your protocol, the type of participants engaged in the research, and any additional risk that may arise by switching from in-person to virtual communication. Revised participant consent forms and processes and or other materials may be required (e.g., to updated privacy considerations with use of different communication channels, update of recruitment materials, using online check boxes to document consent or keeping a consent log in field notes).

While TCPS 2 typically requires review and approval of modifications to approved projects prior to implementation, an exception can be made where the change is necessary to eliminate ***an immediate risk to participant(s)*** (Article 6.15). Should researchers determine that changes in their approved procedures are required to eliminate risks related to the COVID-19 outbreak, they can implement them immediately, without prior notice to or approval from the REB. In such cases, researchers will need to ensure that they are not increasing the level of risk to participants and may need to ask participants to sign revised informed consent forms. Such changes **must** be reported to the REB as soon as possible (no more than 10 business days from occurrence). To report these changes, please submit the *Reporting Changes Made to Approved Projects to Eliminate an Immediate Risk to Participants* event form now available on [Romeo](https://laurier.researchservicesoffice.com/ROMEO.Researcher/%28S%28u5sc4i4ov2xzulra1xgyu2ql%29%29/Login.aspx) (see [Connect](https://lauriercloud.sharepoint.com/sites/office-of-research-services/research-ethics-compliance/research-involving-humans/Pages/romeo-user-guidelines.aspx) or the [Students](https://students.wlu.ca/academics/research/human-research/romeo-research-portal.html) website for instructions). The form requires researchers to outline the changes to approved protocols, why changes were necessary to eliminate risks to participants, and to upload any revised materials. Please note that this is not a blanket approval for protocol changes, and this correspondence only applies to changes made in response to COVI-19 precautions.

While the university cancellation is for research which involves face-to-face interactions with the general public and does not currently apply to research with an internal population, the REB strongly advises researchers to consider if research protocols with an internal population could be also be modified or delayed to limit personal contacts, or laboratory visits. Further, supervisors should be advised to monitor that student researchers are following guidelines and policy as set out by university).

A reminder that where the research involves physical assessments and use of equipment (e.g., gas analysis mouthpieces, treadmills, virtual reality headsets, electroencephalograph, tactile stimulators, or any shared equipment that is handled by multiple participants with bare hands such as peg boards, computer keyboards, or touch screen devices) disinfection according to manufacturer’s standards where applicable is paramount and use of single use accessories is advisable. In the absence of manufacturers standards, thorough cleaning between participants is advised. If research staff are feeling unwell or are exhibiting any symptoms related to COVID-19, care should be taken to prevent transmission of any illness. Institutional policies and guidelines must be followed, if COVID-19 is known or suspected.

This is a fluid situation which we are monitoring closely. Please see Health Canada’s website for up-to-date information:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

REB review of research projects will continue at this time. However, please also note that there may be delays in responding to e-mails and processing reviews at this time due to a high volume of requests and limited resources. Your continued patience and cooperation is appreciated.