

## **Central Michigan University Policy on Field Research and COVID-19**

The intent of this policy is to minimize the risk of COVID-19 disease transmission and protect the health and safety of personnel conducting field research. These requirements are in addition to [existing field safety requirements](#) already in place at CMU. Reference the [Office of Research and Graduate Studies COVID-19 Guidance](#), and [Fired Up for Spring Webpages](#) for more COVID-19 assistance.

### **Section One: Planning for Field Work**

1. Your field research must be approved through the appropriate channels, including department chair, dean, and ORGS before any on-ground or in-person work can begin.
2. All researchers must complete the CMU COVID-19 [Safe Return Training](#).
3. No student, researcher, faculty, or staff member can be required to participate in field research programs that may expose them to COVID-19. No individual shall be punished in any way for refusal to participate in an activity that may expose them to the public and/or potential COVID-19 infection. The principal investigator or research team leader must notify all individuals of their right of refusal.
4. Maintain the [mandatory daily self-screening tool](#) and be aware of the symptoms and signs of COVID-19. Click [here](#) for a list of COVID-19 symptoms and FAQs.
5. Know what PPE, sanitization, and other materials you will need to conduct your research. You or your department may obtain materials from the [University Stores](#) (masks, sanitizer, etc.), but it is possible that the available inventory will be limited or redirected to essential workplaces (i.e. hospitals) if a spike in COVID-19 cases arises. As such, be prepared and have a contingency plan. Details on required and suggested materials are discussed below.
6. Determine if your research can be conducted online with no face-to-face interaction. If it can, then work from home. If you cannot work from home, only include the minimum number of researchers needed to complete work.
7. All participants must review and sign the project's field safety plan. Ensure everyone has read, understands, and is comfortable with the proposed procedures, especially those regarding COVID-19 prevention.

## **Section Two: On-Campus Preparation and Conclusion of Field Work**

1. For the purpose of brevity, lab, shop, office, storage, and other similar rooms will be referred to simply as spaces.
2. Essential undergraduates will be permitted on campus and allowed to carry out field work.
3. Until otherwise noted, all field safety plans must include:
  - a. The previously required field safety plan template to be filled out.
  - b. A thorough description of the research project. This must include justification as to why the research must be conducted at the proposed time and why it cannot be postponed.
  - c. A description of what procedures will be followed by the research team to prevent the contraction or transmission of COVID-19 both in the field and in any enclosed facilities. The procedures should mimic those detailed in Section Three of this document.
  - d. Research conducted at sites that CMU does not own requires the written permission of the landowner. If the team has previously received permission, they should contact the owner via phone call to ensure the landowner is still comfortable with CMU accessing their land. If permission is denied or not obtained, research cannot be conducted at that site. When permission is granted, the date, name, position of the person contacted, and their contact information must be listed in the field safety plan.
  - e. For externally funded fieldwork, it is the responsibility of the PI to verify that the funding agency will reimburse expenses incurred at this time.
4. Follow the [CMU guidance on face coverings](#).
  - a. When in the field and capable of maintaining a six-foot distance, researchers are not required to wear their face covering.
  - b. The lab in which you are working may require more precautions than those mentioned in this document. Clarify with your PI or Department Chair regarding the additional policies applicable to your worksite.
5. Designate one or more worksite supervisors to implement, monitor, and report on the COVID-19 control strategies. The supervisor must remain on-site at all times when employees are present on site. An on-site researcher may be designated to perform the supervisory role. This role can be a day-by-day assignment.

### **Section Three: Working in the Field**

1. Pursuant with Section 1.4, field research teams must maintain the symptom tracker for every member.
2. If possible, a safe distance of at least six feet between researchers shall be maintained at all times when outdoors. If this distance must be breached, researchers must wear face coverings.
3. The use of shared materials should be minimized. Researchers should bring their own pens, packs, paper, and other required equipment. Equipment that must be shared (soil corers, nets, etc.) should be sanitized before and after an individual's use. If limited sanitization equipment is a concern, one researcher should be assigned to each piece of equipment (i.e. one person cores the soil, another bags it, a third records any data). This will ensure that the equipment will only need to be sanitized when it is picked up at the beginning of research and dropped off at the end.
4. Researchers should bring their own food and drink and should not share items.
5. Visits to non-essential public places (restaurants, clothing stores, etc.) should be eliminated unless absolutely necessary due to extenuating circumstances. Visits to essential places (gas stations, hardware stores, etc.) should be carried out with caution and hands and the materials purchased should be sanitized.
6. Given that many people are out of work and school, interactions with the public may be more frequent. When working in public areas, researchers must be prepared to interact with members of the public. These individuals may be curious or agitated. Be prepared to politely and safely address the curious and inform those who believe you are violating social distancing policy that your research is sanctioned and appropriate safety measures are being taken.
7. If non-CMU agencies or research partners are actively engaged in the research, the research should be conducted using the guidelines that are the most stringent.

#### **Section Four: Travel and Lodging**

1. When traveling in vehicles, only one person can occupy a vehicle at any given time, unless occupants can be seated at least six feet apart with the windows rolled down, or be seated closer but wearing masks with windows down. Be sure to sanitize all touched surfaces of the vehicle before and after use.
2. Given the variability in COVID-19 laws and regulations between states, all out of state travel requests will be handled on a case-by-case basis.
3. Travel permissions will follow federal and state restrictions and CDC recommendations, particularly when travel includes visiting any identified high-risk location. If travel is deemed essential and approved by appropriate vice president/dean/supervisor and requires travel to a high-risk destination or out of state, the traveler should be prepared to self-quarantine after their return.
4. The use of boats in research is permitted as long as proper social distancing and sanitization methods are employed. Minimize the number of researchers on the vessel by requiring only the minimum number of researchers to safely operate the vessel and conduct the research. Wear face masks at all times, maintain a six-foot distance from others on board, and sanitize commonly touched surfaces such as lifejackets.
5. Research teams are allowed to lodge in hotels. Only one individual is allowed per hotel room or tent. However, participants should remain cautious and continue to practice social distancing, wear face masks, and sanitize commonly touched surfaces such as door handles, keycards, TV remotes, and faucets. Also, consider using stairs rather than elevators when possible to avoid close-quarters interaction with others.
  - a. Some extenuating circumstances may apply. For example, if lodging at a field site for multiple weeks, a research team may be considered a household, allowing several individuals to occupy a residence. However, such conditions must be approved before they are to be realized.
6. Remote work that requires lodging and/or long-term stays presents unique challenges. Consider the following:
  - a. As testing becomes more widely available, researchers should be tested before conducting any remote study to eliminate the risk of them bringing the virus to others and reduce the chance that they will fall dangerously ill in a remote location.
  - b. Individuals planning to participate in remote work should self-quarantine as much as possible before traveling to the remote site.
  - c. Purchasing of food, supplies and contact with society outside the field crew should be limited to as few individual interactions as possible.

- d. If a member of the field crew experiences COVID-19 symptoms the following steps are required:
  - i. The individual must cease field work and self-quarantine. Contingency funds for a separate hotel room or other measures must be considered by the PI before research begins.
  - ii. The nearest medical facility on record in the field safety plan should be notified of the situation for medical advisement and COVID-19 testing of the individual.
  - iii. Follow [CMU reporting requirements](#).
  - iv. The decision as to whether the remaining field crew continues work will depend on the situation. A risk assessment should be completed considering the skills and training of those individuals remaining on the crew. Extra efforts should be taken to isolate from the public.