

COVID-19 PHASE 3

Restart Guidelines for Researchers



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Introduction

The Vice-President, Research & Innovation (VPRI) has established the COVID-19 Return to [Research Transition Committee](#) to assess, consult, and recommend to the University a phased resumption of on-campus and field research, subject to public health guidance. Upon notification that the Province of Ontario had transitioned into Phase 2, Stage 3 of re-opening, the VPRI invited additional members to the Committee from the Office of Research Services (ORS) and Research Ethics Board (REB) to ensure a coordinated approach to restarting research, including face-to-face research/service activity on campus and in the community.

Research, including related service and education activities conducted under the authority of the VPRI (i.e., by Research Centres and Research Institutes) at Lakehead University has continued remotely whenever possible, or on campus and in the field/community under government approved allowances and exceptions. However, research that was unable to be carried out remotely was halted and as the Province of Ontario enters Phase III, needs to restart. The restarting of research activities must be done safely in order to prevent or reduce the spread of COVID-19. All research operations will be subject to these requirements including those that have continued under prior to the release of these guidelines.

Health and safety remains our first priority.

It is important to be cognizant that the unpredictability of ongoing COVID-19 outbreaks may necessitate additional restrictions and/or a return to the curtailment of research on-campus and the field/community. It is also important to recognize that the process of reopening on campus research and resuming field research and community-based research will take time and be an uneven process and may take longer depending on the target population and the ability to institute appropriate health and safety protocols. The strategy will require ongoing consultation, the management of expectations, and a commitment to process and collegiality.

Lakehead University is committed to social justice and making significant contributions to our communities and society as a whole through our research. We must recognize that research activities under pandemic conditions involves complex and often competing needs of students, especially graduate students, involved in research as well as faculty across different disciplines. We understand that a recommended phased in approach to restarting research activities on campus, in the field and in community(ies) will mean some researchers (including students) will be able to restart research before others. We must have patience regarding the additional compliance and reporting requirements, and the administrative, maintenance, and special project planning workflow that we are dealing with in order to keep our university and the broader community safe. All research involving face to face with human participants must have REB approval prior to restarting.

Consultation Process

June 2020:

- Committee members participated in provincial and national virtual conversations and groups looking at various possibilities of safely restarting research across the various institutions.
- Committee members met virtually with research partners (including NOSM, Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences, Laurentian University, and Georgian College) to discuss a coordinated approach to research restart in shared facilities.
- The VPRI, held a virtual Research Roundtable on May 29, 2020, where information about the establishment and work of the COVID-19 Return to Research Transition Committee was shared and updated. Participants were able to pre-submit questions and raise questions during the live Q&A session.
- Members of the Committee met virtually with the Faculty Deans to discuss the committee's recommendations.
- A Draft of the COVID-19 Research Restart Transition Committee's Recommendations was shared with researchers, Faculty Deans, and other stakeholder units including Faculty of Graduate Studies, Lakehead International, Security, the Library, and TSC. Input was solicited and welcomed over email.
- Members of the Committee met virtually with researchers to discuss the committee's Draft recommendations.
- Members of the Committee met virtually with graduate students to discuss the committee's Draft recommendations.

August 2020:

- Committee members met with members of the REB at Lakehead University
- A Draft of the COVID-19 revised for Phase 3 Research Restart Transition Committee's Recommendations was shared with researchers, the Faculty Deans of Lakehead University, and the Associate Dean of Research at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM).
- Communication of changes highlighting what has been changed and/or added was shared with the university community.
- User-friendly guidelines were uploaded for easier online navigation.

Definitions, Scope and Jurisdiction

Definitions:

Research/Activities under the jurisdiction of the VPRI include:

- a) **Community Engagement and Community-based Research** includes working with community partners, NGOs, community members, etc.;
- b) **Creative activities** include, but are not limited to, creating musical compositions or artworks in various media, musical performances, curating art exhibitions, etc.;
- c) **Field Work** includes all research off campus including research with human participants;
- d) **Research Internships** involve mentoring and working with students on research projects;
- e) **Service and/or Education Activities** include, but are not limited to, offering workshops and/or speakers series to community members, working with focus groups, offering services to specific groups paid for by contracts administered by the Office of Research Services, outreach activities within communities, etc., delivered by groups under the jurisdiction of the VPRI such as Research Centres and Research Institutes;
- f) **External Locations and Partner Institutions** include, but are not limited to: facilities or locations such as health authorities (i.e., hospitals, clinics, etc.), schools, museums, archives, private sector, community-based settings, and affiliated institutions (i.e., Georgian College, NOSM, etc.).

Scope:

These guidelines and directives pertain to all faculty, staff, students, post-docs, visiting scholars and students, community members, individuals affiliated with Research Centres and Research Institutes or collaborating with members of Lakehead University, who are engaged in on-campus and/or off-campus research activities at Lakehead's Thunder Bay, Orillia and Barrie campuses, fieldwork, or in-person research involving human participants.

Faculty, staff and students conducting research in Health Authority-based facilities (i.e., hospitals, health clinics, etc.) must follow the directives of the relevant Health Authorities and Lakehead University. Lakehead University's Phase 3 Restart Guidelines for Researchers are aligned with the Ontario Government's Phase 2, Stage 3 Reopening Framework which can be found here: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/reopening-ontario>.

Jurisdiction:

- All human participatory research requires approval by the Research Ethics Board (REB).
- Service and/or education activities under the jurisdiction of the VPRI will be reviewed by the with final approval by the VPRI.

Channels of Approval:

Applications to obtain Phase 3 Restart Approval may be accessed by visiting the [COVID-19 Application Portal for Researchers](#). Applications must receive approvals in the following order (as applicable):

1. a) REB (for research/activities including human participants); or, b) Animal Care Committee (ACC) (for research involving animals)
2. VPRI COVID-19 Advisory Review Committee (C19ARC) (for education/service activities including human participants)
3. Faculty Deans
4. VPRI

Guiding Principles

- The health and well-being of students, staff, and faculty members, and the broader community is paramount. To ensure the health and well-being of everyone, we need to implement and follow measures that will prevent or reduce the spread of COVID-19 on our campuses and communities.
- During the initial phases of in person research restart in the lab and in the field/community, participation is voluntary and to be determined by the individual researcher (faculty, staff, students/community members) according to their comfort and needs.
- The orders, notices and guidance of the Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario, and the local Health Units (in Thunder Bay and Simcoe County) will be continuously monitored and followed.
- Research activity on campus or the field/community, depending on COVID-19 outbreaks and hotspots, may require additional restrictions and/or a return to the curtailment of research. This will be done in response to government or public health guidance or changes regarding the situation on our campuses. Increased activity in research facilities and in the field/community must be conducted with the understanding that

circumstances could change at any time and researchers must be prepared to decrease, alter, or cease activity in a structured way if necessary.

- The process of returning to conduct research on campus and in the field/community must be sensitive to a range of distinct constraints, including:
 - a. existing policies, regulations and guidelines, whether research-specific, such as those imposed by the Research Ethics Board, Animal Care Committee, Bio-Safety Committee, and those policies observed/imposed by partner institutions (where Lakehead University labs are a tenant); or in general, such as workplace health and safety; and,
 - b. availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Communal Protective Equipment (CPE), COVID-19 prevention awareness, and other risk-mitigation measures.
- There will be a phased and coordinated approach across each campus and with our partners to safely restart research led by the Office of the VPRI.
- Permission to conduct on-campus or field/community research and scholarship may be granted to those who require on-campus resources, access to field work, and cannot work remotely. Those researchers seeking to resume face-to-face human research must follow the directives of the [REB](#).
- Faculty or staff who have concerns about returning to conduct research on campus or in the field/community should discuss this with their supervisor(s), Human Resources, Faculty Deans, relevant Research Ethics Board Chair, the Human Rights and Equity Office, and/or employee groups, as appropriate.
- Students who have concerns, questions or want advice about returning to conduct research on campus or in the field/community should contact their supervisor(s), Faculty Dean and/or the Faculty of Graduate Studies, relevant Research Ethics Board Chair, and the existing channels as appropriate.

Processes and Guidelines

Phased-in Return to Research

Research that can be carried out remotely should continue to be carried out remotely. Safely restarting research on our campuses and in the field/community that cannot be performed remotely will require a flexible phased in return to research in order to mitigate potential risk. Principal investigators and/or supervisors are responsible for adopting and communicating the provisions of this plan for their own research lab or activities, including with the REB for any amendments to current protocols. It is critical that all supervisors, staff and students adhere to the guidelines that describe various safety protocols.

The main emphasis guiding our staged reopening is putting in place procedures to ensure the safety of all research personnel, which includes building, infrastructure and safe working practices to maintain *physical distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19*. The following are representative of the criteria that should be addressed.

On Campus Research:

- Buildings must be made ready for occupancy and implement safety protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19 before labs in that building can be considered for re-opening.
- Supervisors must submit [Phase 3: Application for Access to On-Campus Research Laboratories and Facilities Form](#)
- to their Dean and the VPRI indicating the research cannot be done remotely.
- When granted approval, all the necessary preparations to permit a safe return to work must be made. This will involve faculty, managers, technicians and group safety officers from the individual research laboratories.
- Supervisors must inspect their own labs for safety and maintenance deficiencies before they reopen their labs. This safety review must include all applicable items on the checklists provided to meet COVID-19 safety guidelines or measures.
- Supervisors must review the maintenance and operation of all lab instrumentation prior to initiating research.
- Supervisors must establish NEW protocols for accessing all research spaces, which could either limit the number of people in a room or establish a service system that requires samples to be deposited at a central location to maintain *physical distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19*.
- In shared lab spaces, all supervisors must develop the NEW protocols in consultation.
- All data should be sent to the researchers electronically to be analyzed remotely.
- Supervisors must complete any required training and develop a training plan for job specific protocols for staff and students or research space users.
- Supervisors must review all support services prior to initiating research to develop a plan that maximizes *physical distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19*.
- Supervisors must restrict access to **shared associated lab office(s)**, avoid using paper, and switch to an entirely electronic platform to permit administrative staff to work remotely, unless essential.
- Supervisors must reconfigure communal areas to prevent users from congregating. For example, remove chairs, mark specific areas, and prominently post signage to reinforce *physical distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19*. Encourage users to plan around meal times to be on campus only as needed. <https://www.lakeheadu.ca/faculty-and-staff/departments/services/hr/health-safety/tb/lab-safety/chemical-safety-program/laboratory-safety-operating-procedures>
- Supervisors must develop an individual work plan that details the safe operation of their groups within the space. This would consider the following:
 - Maximum and minimum number of people working at any one time.

- Detail breaking research groups into subdivided teams/shifts and how the process would be safely managed.
- Protocols for using communal equipment in the laboratory.
- Coordinate with other groups also using the space, particularly for shared laboratories to avoid crowding.
- Provide a ramp down plan in the case that the group has to cease research rapidly due to tightening of COVID restrictions.
- Supervisors are provided with a template for their written Research Group Physical Distancing Plan to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Appendix B); the plan must be made available to the Joint Health and Safety Committee and other internal approval groups.
- If Supervisors need help with technical questions as they develop their individual plans to comply with the NEW protocols and guidelines, they must contact Health & Safety and/or Physical Plant.

Human Participant Research Activity:

The Lakehead University REB will continue reviewing and approving ethics applications and amendments as appropriate. The REB will also begin to allow in-person research to resume in Phase 3 of the University's Research Transition Plan. Due to COVID-19, any current research that can be done remotely, must be done remotely. The safety of participants and researchers is the primary concern of the Research Ethics Board.

The REB is allowing in-person research that:

- cannot be done remotely;
- follows provincial government regulations; and
- is justified, the partner (if applicable) agrees to restart, and a Human Participant Safety Plan is provided.

*Note – the REB can provide research ethics approval to start/re-start research, however, can't provide approval for access to on-campus space and travel/fieldwork. This approval process is through the Office of the Vice-President, Research & Innovation and the Faculty Deans and takes place once REB approval is in place.

Please refer to the Lakehead University [Research Ethics Board webpage](#) and the Research COVID-19 FAQ webpage for all information and procedures relating to the REB.

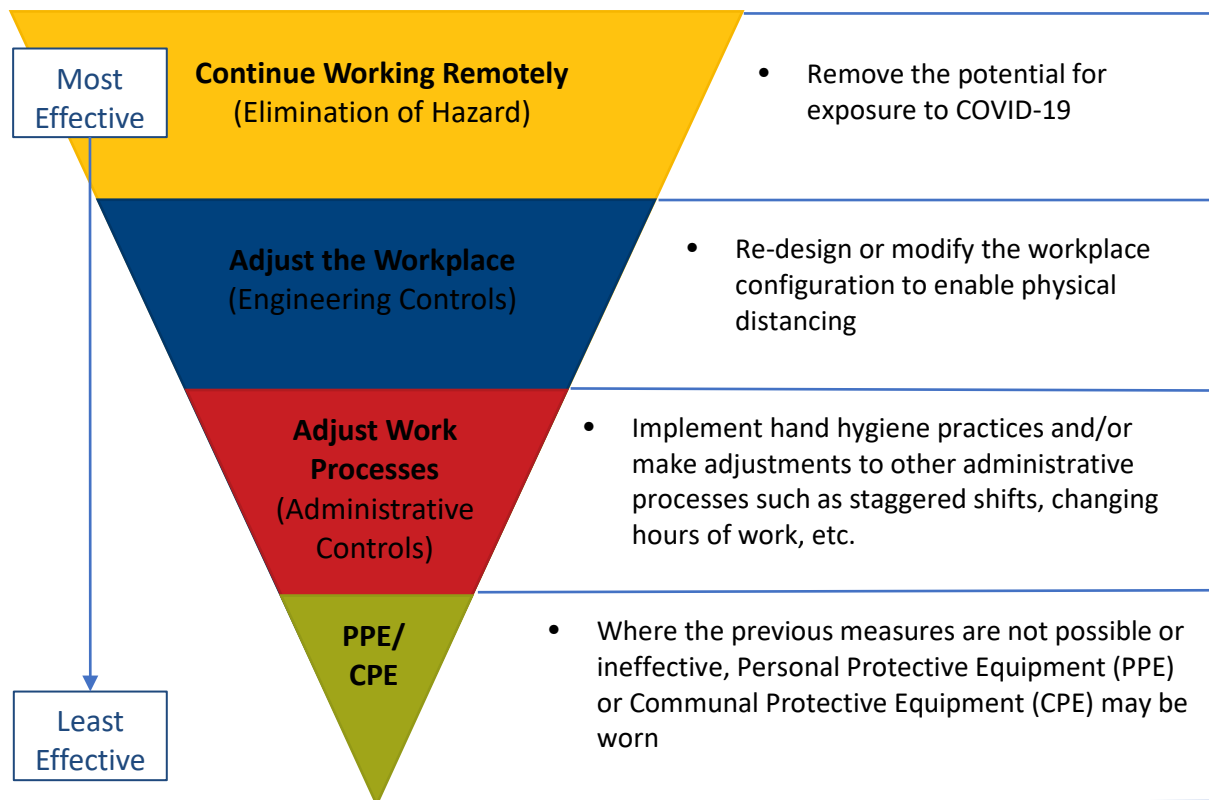
Field Work (without human participants) including International Research Activity:

Supervisors must complete the COVID-19 Research [Phase 3: Travel, Field Work, and Off-Campus Research/Activity - Request for Approval Form](#) for researchers to resume any field work that does not involve human participants. Supervisors must describe how they will ensure the health and safety of all employees, students and staff by addressing the following:

- The field research can be conducted while complying with social distancing and hygiene protocols as required by the Thunder Bay and District Health Authority, the Simcoe-Muskoka District Health Unit, Government of Canada, and Province of Ontario.
- A transportation plan must ensure vehicle travel and hygiene protocols are followed (see guidelines below).
- Accommodation/lodging plan must ensure social distancing and hygiene protocols are followed (see guidelines below).
- There is no sharing of specimens.
- Travel to remote and rural communities, including Indigenous communities, requires both the approval and observance of requirements from the communities. A letter from the Chief and Council and/or the Authority with jurisdiction must be included with the Travel Approval Form.
- Mitigation plan to return safely from the field and follow the Health Units' guidance if an individual or individuals are unwell and/or contract COVID-19.
- Travel advisories for international travel must be observed as well as Lakehead University's travel bans.

Hierarchy of Hazard Control

Hazard mitigation should always focus on implementing control measures to eliminate or reduce risk. For this purpose, the hierarchy of controls must be considered. This hierarchy can be applied to any hazard in the workplace including COVID-19. A brief overview of this concept is highlighted below.



Standard Guidelines for Fieldwork

- Participation must be entirely voluntary.
- Field work personnel must complete Lakehead University's COVID Awareness Course prior to beginning field work.
- All researchers must conduct daily self-monitoring for symptoms using the [Government of Ontario COVID-19 self-assessment tool](#). If individuals are feeling unwell in any way or are advised to initiate further medical follow up on completion of the self-assessment tool, they should immediately refrain from fieldwork, return home and self-isolate as soon as possible. Other team members should be able to continue field work as long as they have always strictly adhered to distancing and cleaning requirements, not exhibiting symptoms and are not working alone.
- All research team members must also know how to access the nearest hospitals and emergency medical services.

- The research team must be able to monitor, on a daily basis, any new directives from public health officials, or Lakehead administration for the area they are in.
- There must be a contingency plan for any team member to return home in the event they cannot continue their work for any reason.

Physical Distancing while Working and Traveling

Screening and Tracking

- All researchers must self-monitor for symptoms daily. If a researcher is feeling unwell in any way they are to stop work, inform their team and supervisor immediately, and complete the [Government of Ontario COVID-19 self-assessment tool](#). The results of this tool will determine next steps for that person.
- Keep detailed records of where and when you have traveled, who you have travelled with, and the locations of the fieldwork such that tracking can be provided to the local public health unit should a researcher become ill with COVID-19.
- Review restrictions by Canadian and Provincial Governments regarding travel within the Province and across Canada (see below)

Vehicle Travel Guidelines and Hygiene

- Travel is restricted to one person in a vehicle. A detailed plan for exposure prevention must be outlined in the fieldwork risk assessment, including transportation availability should any individual need to leave for any reason and specifically if becoming ill.
- Exceptional circumstances as to why more than one person in a vehicle is needed, including mobility/accessibility issues, must be clearly stated. If the exceptional circumstances request is approved, up to two people may travel in a large van with 3 or more rows of seats where the two individuals can sit at least 2 m apart. The car ventilation should be set to fresh air only (no recirculation of air) and if possible, windows should be open to maximize air flow. A detailed plan for exposure prevention must be outlined in the fieldwork risk assessment, including transportation availability should any individual need to leave for any reason and specifically if becoming ill.
- Eliminate clutter in the vehicles and organize gear to limit the contact between belongings and to make cleaning easier. Have a garbage bag in the cab of the vehicle.
- Research teams must have access to essential services, including grocery stores, gas stations, etc. Only one team member should be tasked with accessing these services and should do so with limited frequency. If physical distancing is not achievable and hand hygiene is not available. Abide by local ordinances regarding face coverings etc. even where not mandatory, face coverings are to be worn, when physical distancing of 2 m cannot be maintained.

- Handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer should be performed immediately before and after each vehicle ride.
- Team members must have appropriate supplies to thoroughly disinfect and regularly clean vehicle surfaces and equipment, including before any use by other team members.
- Supplies should include disinfectant wipes, disposable gloves for use in cleaning and disinfection, disposable garbage bags, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, paper towels and sufficient masks for personnel for the duration of the trip.
- Before each trip, clean or disinfect the frequently touched surfaces including door handles, seatbelt buckles, steering wheels, etc. in the vehicle.
- Follow the manufacturer's guidelines on the use of the cleaning/disinfecting products and wear disposable gloves if necessary.
- Proper training on donning and doffing gloves is necessary if gloves are required. After removal of gloves appropriate hand hygiene must be conducted.
- Avoid unnecessary contact with frequently touched surfaces such as door frames/handles, seatbelt buckles, steering wheel, etc.
- Trucking rest stops present a possible exposure risk – review IHSA documents in the Resources section at the end of this document. Washrooms, gas pump handles, countertops, keypads, etc. are areas of possible exposure. Hand wash or sanitize after touching these surfaces. Avoid the use of cash whenever possible.
- When refilling the vehicle, wipe down gas pump handles, touch pads and other highly touched surfaces before use. If this is not possible, wash hands or use sanitizer after use.
- Everyone should handle their own personal bags and belongings during loading and unloading.
- Do not engage in any field research where you cannot maintain appropriate physical distancing (2m). This must be followed both within Ontario and outside of Ontario.
- Physical distance (2m) must be maintained between any individual, including other team members. At the same time, field workers should not work alone.
- Access to restricted areas as mandated by Provincial Governments and Indigenous Communities must be adhered to. If access to restricted areas is essential, authorization and documents must be obtained from the appropriate bodies. Keep these documents on you at all times during the fieldwork.
- Do not engage in any field research requiring face to face discussions with members of the public, unless physical distancing can be maintained.
- All research team members must have individual accommodations during overnight stays.
- Bedding (unless using hotel accommodations), clothing, and other personal supplies must be bagged and kept separate from that of others.

Site Access and Procedures in the Field

Accommodations

- Launder clothes and shower as soon as possible upon arriving home.
- Meals must allow for appropriate distancing and avoid sharing of any utensils including large spoons, tongs, etc.

Handling documentation, reports, and paperwork

- Use technology for communication as much as possible (e.g., text messaging and mobile phones) rather than having in-person conversations.
- Where possible, use technology to send and receive paperwork (e.g. scanning equipment).
- Do not share pens, notebooks, computers, etc. but provide each researcher with their own supplies where possible.
- Clean and disinfect all equipment used each day using soap and water, if possible, or disinfectant wipes. Remove gloves and wash hands once the cleaning of equipment is complete.

Resources

- Public Health Ontario [COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#)
- Public Health Agency of Canada [Travel Restrictions and Exemptions](#)
- Public Health Agency of Canada [Prevention and Risks](#)
- IHSA [Guidance on Cleaning and Sanitizing Inside your Vehicle During COVID-19](#)
- Public Health Ontario [Handwashing](#)
- Public Health Agency of Canada [Non-medical masks and face coverings](#)

On-Campus and Off-Campus Research, Education and/or Service Activities (under the jurisdiction of the VPRI) with Community Members:

- Currently, no conferences are permitted to be held on Lakehead University's campuses.
- Meetings and/or research activities that can be done remotely should continue to be done remotely whenever possible.
- In-person meetings and/or activities on-campus and off-campus with community members require the approval of the C19ARC and the VPRI.

Research Restart on Campus and in the Field/Community Guidelines:

- All faculty, staff, and students coming onto campus, going into the field, and/or going into the community **must complete the Ontario Government's online self-assessment. This needs to be completed daily or every time before you come onto campus, the field, and/or the community.** If the assessment indicates that you are in an at-risk group, you should self-isolate, or you should seek medical care, and you should not attempt to enter. <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/#q0>.
- Everyone working in research spaces and in the field/community must keep a log book of everyone they come into close contact with daily as well as any public spaces and times they access. The log will not be shared with Lakehead University but may be required by the district health unit(s) should they contract COVID-19.
- In case of supervisor illness, an alternate supervisor familiar with the lab must be appointed.
- If you become unwell during the working day, you must leave campus/isolate yourself. (NOTE: look for what to do if you become unwell in the field/community/off-campus). If you notice a colleague appearing unwell, encourage them to go home and inform your direct supervisor via email.
- If you test positive for COVID-19 or have any other reason to believe you have been infected, please inform your supervisor *via* email and let them know immediately any directives provided by the Health Unit(s).
- Maintain a minimum of 2 m distance between ALL individuals at all times, *even if two individuals are living together*. (While it may seem that cohabiting individuals could stand closer together, other observers and/or inspectors may not know or want to ask whether two people are cohabiting.)
- Non-medical masks (face-shields are acceptable when non-medical masks are not tolerated by an individual) must be worn in indoor public spaces and whenever 2m of physical distancing cannot be maintained (including outdoors).
- Wearing gloves (outside of the lab) is not recommended by Public Health and does not add significant protection. In accordance with Lakehead's standard operating procedure <https://www.lakeheadu.ca/faculty-and-staff/departments/services/hr/health-safety/tb/lab-safety/chemical-safety-program/laboratory-safety-operating-procedures>.
- Washing hands frequently with soap and water is essential to lowering the risk of transmission.
- Practice cough/sneeze etiquette. Sneeze or cough into your sleeve at the inside of your elbow.
- Do not touch your face. Wash your hands immediately afterwards if you have touched your face.

- Surfaces that are frequently touched by more than one person must be disinfected frequently and must be listed in your plan. REMEMBER: Never trust a surface you touch, irrespective of when it may have been cleaned.
- *Physical distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19* of at least 2 m must be practiced in stairwells, hallways, entryways, shipping/receiving areas, and other common areas of campus.
- Meetings should continue to be held electronically rather than in person.
- **REMINDER: ALL Research involving human participants must seek approval by the REB.**
- **REMINDER: ALL Educational/Service Activities with community members under the jurisdiction of the VPRI must be reviewed by the C19ARC and approved by the VPRI.**