

COVID-19 Research Restart Transition Committee DRAFT Recommendations

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COVID-19 Research Restart Transition Committee:

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COVID-19 Research Restart DRAFT Recommendations

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.

Research at Lakehead University has continued whenever possible to be done remotely, or on campus and in the field under government approved allowances and exceptions. Some research which has not been able to be done remotely, however, has stopped and needs to restart safely to prevent or reduce the spread of COVID-19. All research operations will be subject to these requirements including those that have continued prior to the release of these guidelines.

Health and safety remains our first priority.

It is important to recognize that the unpredictability of continued COVID-19 outbreaks may necessitate a return to stricter curtailment of on-campus and field research at any point. It is also important to recognize that the process of reopening on campus research and resuming field research will take time and be uneven. The strategy will require ongoing consultation, managing 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 implicates complex and often competing needs of students, especially graduate students, involved in research as well as faculty in different disciplines. We understand that a recommended phased in approach to restarting research activities on campus and in the field will mean some researchers (including students) will have access before others. We must have patience regarding the additional compliance, reporting, administrative, maintenance, and special project planning workflow that we are dealing with in order to keep our university community and our communities at large safe.

Consultation Process (STILL IN PROGRESS):

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 Vice-President, Research and Innovation, 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.

Members of the Committee met virtually with graduate students 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 and over a second virtual Research Roundtable specific to discussing COVID-19 Research Restart Transition Committee's Draft Recommendations.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- The health and well-being of students, staff, and faculty members is paramount. To ensure the health and well-being of our university community, we need to implement and follow measures that will prevent or reduce the spread of COVID-19 on our campuses and communities.
- 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 may need to be reversed and stricter curtailment conditions imposed in response to government or public health guidance or changes to the situation on our campuses. Increased activity in research facilities and in the field must be conducted under a plan to decrease or cease activity in a structured way if needed.
- The process of returning to conduct research on campus and in the field must be sensitive to a range of distinct constraints, including:
 - a. existing policies and guidelines, whether research-specific, such as REB guidelines and Animal Care Services SOPs; or general, such as workplace 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 Vice-President, Research and Innovation.
- Permission to conduct on-campus or field research and scholarship may be granted to those who require on-campus resources, access to field work, and cannot work remotely.

- Concerns about returning to conduct research on campus or in the field should be discussed with the supervisor(s), Human Resources, Faculty Graduate Studies, the Human Rights and Equity Office, and/or employee groups, as appropriate.

PROCESSES AND GUIDELINES:

Phased Return to Research

Research that can be done remotely should continue to be performed in this way. Safely restarting research on our campuses and in the field which cannot be performed remotely will require a phased-in return to research in order to be flexible and mitigate potential problems. Principal investigators and/or supervisors are responsible for adopting and communicating the provisions of this plan for their own research lab or activities. 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 safe before labs in that building can be considered for re-opening.
- Supervisors must submit a request for reopen approval to 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 checklist 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*.
- 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 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 by the Joint Health and Safety Committee and other internal approval groups.

Field Work:

- Supervisors must complete the [Domestic Researcher Travel – Request for Approval form](#) to receive approval to conduct field work.
- 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 there is no sharing of vehicles.
 - Accommodation/lodging plan must ensure social distancing and hygiene protocols are followed.
 - There is no sharing of specimens.
 - There is no required face-to-face interaction with human participants.
 - There is no travel to remote and rural communities, including Indigenous communities.

- 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.

Research Restart on Campus and in the Field Guidelines:

- During the phased in period, returning to research on campus and in the field is **on a voluntary basis** following Government and local Health Units directives. No penalties should be assessed against individuals who decline to come to campus or continue on-site experimental work.
- All faculty, staff, and students coming onto campus **must complete the Ontario Government's online self-assessment. This needs to be completed daily or every time before you come onto campus.** 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 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 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. 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.
- Maintain a minimum of 2 m (6 ft) 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 (not face-shields) should be worn in the building whenever 2m of interpersonal separation cannot be maintained.
- 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 (6 ft) 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.
- Visitors and the public must not be brought onto campus until the partial ban is lifted.

APPENDIX A: RESOURCES FOR COVID-19

For the latest information about working in laboratories during the CoVid-19 pandemic, please see the Research & Innovation Coronavirus (COVID-19) Research [web site](#). Please take the time to review the University's [Coronavirus page and FAQs on COVID-19](#) .

Lakehead University Posters on COVID-19

[Link to posters coming soon](#)

Cough etiquette
Research facility entry
Handwashing
Hand-sanitizer

Thunder Bay District Health Unit

<https://www.tbdhu.com/coronavirus>

Simcoe – Muskoka District Health Unit

<http://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/Topics/COVID-19>

Appendix B: Research Resumption Plan Template

Overview:

This document must be completed prior to the resumption of on-campus research as a means to document new procedures required to reduce potential transmission of CoVid-19 within your research group. When completed, in conjunction with the Start-up Lab Safety Checklist, Laboratory Physical Distancing to Prevent the Spread of CoVid-19 Checklist, this document will serve as your written safety plan, if sections below do not provide enough space, append pages as necessary or use the headings and information given below as a template in your own document.

Normal safety rules still apply. Do not allow the focus on Covid-19 to distract you from practicing normal safety protocols.

PI/Supervisor Name:

Email Address:

Laboratory Space(s)/Room Numbers:

Building:

Campus:

Number of Personnel requiring access to lab:

1.0 Establish Priority Levels

Identify researchers who can continue to work remotely. Do not allow all researchers to return to the lab at once; those who can continue to work remotely are expected to do so. Supervisors are encouraged to prioritize lab time for student researchers who are about to finish their degrees or about to finish a manuscript/project/thesis.

2.0 Physical/Social Distancing

2.1 Identify the building and room # of each of your research space(s) to the VPRI. The Space Inventory Committee will determine the area from which it can be determined how many personnel are permitted in each room. Contact the VPRI and/or Physical Plant for assistance as

required. Post a map at the lab's entrance with the maximum allowable occupancy of each room/area to maintain physical distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19. At the present time, the Province of Ontario has limited persons in public spaces to five or less and 2 metres physical distance.

2.2 Describe your plan to ensure distancing of at least 2 metres between anyone in the lab or participating in research. Please consider lab/bench space, shared equipment, and desk seating. If not needed, explain in the box below. If visual reminders will be needed, describe what and where they will be used. If one-way traffic patterns will be used in the lab, describe it (or append a floor plan).

3.0 Scheduling Staff to Support Physical Distancing

Describe your schedule for implementing specific research teams and varied schedules to support physical distancing. If not needed, explain in the box below. Supervisors should consider which members of their research team have close contact outside of research obligations (if known) in order to facilitate creation of research teams.

Minimum Required Measures:

- Create a sign in/sign out log for your research space. This must be digital, where possible. Records are to be maintained by the Supervisor.
- If research teams/shifts are created, members of one team cannot use the time slot assigned to another team. The goal of the teams is to limit close contacts in the event that a group member contracts CoVid-19. This will ensure some research continuity.

Details and Additional Measures:

4.0 Screening

4.1 Self -Assessment:

Daily, before attending campus, everyone must take the [Ontario Ministry of Health self-assessment online](#). Please follow the results of your assessment, and self-isolate if directed.

Minimum Required Measures:

- Provide link/phone number for Province's Self-Assessment Tool <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/>

4.2 Contact Tracing

Everyone working in research spaces must keep a log book of everyone they come into close contact with daily. Public places and dates/times they visited should also be recorded. The log will not be shared with Lakehead University but may be required by the district health unit should they contract COVID-19.

Minimum Required Measures:

- Lab personnel are informed they must keep a log of their close contacts and places they visit.
- Lab Personnel must acknowledge these requirements

5.0 Cleaning

5.1 Laboratory

Identify the surfaces in your lab that will require frequent cleaning, how often, and who in the research group will be responsible for cleaning. Identify which cleaning products will be used. Regularly disinfect shared equipment surfaces within the research before and after use with either:

- 0.1% sodium hypochlorite (active ingredient in bleach) for 5 minutes of contact time then rinsed with water – note that sodium hypochlorite is corrosive;
- 70% ethanol;

- 0.5% accelerated hydrogen peroxide products such as PreEmpt (follow manufacturers' recommendations for contact time); or,
- other hard surface disinfectant approved by Health Canada.

Minimum Required Measures:

- Surfaces that are frequently touched by more than one person must be disinfected frequently (before and after individual use). This is the responsibility of the supervisors of those rooms. A checklist confirming cleaning must be provided.
 - Equipment surfaces
 - Bench tops
 - Faucets
 - Fume hood sash and workspace
 - Door handles
 - Telephones
 - keyboards/mouse/computers
- DO NOT use a flammable disinfectant or sanitizer on any electrical device such as light switches, as the vapors may ignite.

Details and Additional Measures:

5.2 Shared and Common Spaces

Identify any common spaces and equipment – including kitchen/break areas, office areas, frequently touched surfaces (e.g. door handles, computer keyboards, etc.) – which must be cleaned before and after each use by individuals. Shared areas with other lab groups must communicate clearly that individual cleaning has been completed. NOTE: publicly accessible spaces such as hallway seating areas, washrooms, entry doors etc. will be cleaned by Physical Plant following Health Canada guidelines.

6.0 Signage [\(coming soon\)](#)

The following signs are to be posted in prominent locations within the lab:

Minimum Measures Required:

- Cough Etiquette
- Handwashing and/or hand-sanitizing Procedure
- CoVid Safety Protocol
- Distancing poster

Additional Signs needed:

7.0 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) / Communal Protective Equipment (CPE)

Identify whether PPE for normal laboratory activities will be sufficient to limit the spread of CoVid-19 or whether Communal Protective Equipment (CPE) would benefit your research team. NOTE: Reliance on CPE to limit spread of CoVid-19 is not sufficient. PPE effectiveness and general safety must not be compromised by the wearing of CPE.

Minimum Required measures:

- Normal PPE (personal protective equipment) rules continue to apply.
- Don't share masks, goggles, face shields, or other PPE/CPE with other people. Don't use PPE/CPE that others have used.

Details and additional Measures:

8.0 Working Alone Procedures

Researchers must not conduct hazardous procedures when working alone. Identify any laboratory tasks below that are too hazardous to conduct when working alone or after hours.

Minimum Required Measures:

- When working alone in labs on campus, lab members will use the Keep In Touch service offered by Security Services.
 - Thunder Bay (807) 343-8569
 - Orillia (705) 330-4008 ext. 2009
- Tasks which are too hazardous to be conducted when working alone or after hours are listed below.

9.0 Communications

Create a contact list including all lab personnel. Test your text string, group chat, email group etc. to facilitate emergency communications. Ensure that emergency contacts listed on the exterior lab doors are correct and emergency contact numbers are filed with Security Services. Detail your group's communication plan below:

Details and Additional Measures:

10.0 Ramp-down Plan

If required to ramp down, what steps will be taken to safely ramp down as quickly as possible.

Details and Additional Measures:

11.0 Revisions

As the Province of Ontario proceeds through their reopening framework, the guidelines will change, and this document will be updated. Supervisors are ultimately responsible for ensuring they keep up to date with the status of Provincial reopening as well as updated measures in place at Lakehead University. Updated information on the University's requirements will be available on the [Office of the Vice President Research and Innovation website](https://www.lakeheadu.ca/research-and-innovation/research-faqs-relating-to-covid-19):
<https://www.lakeheadu.ca/research-and-innovation/research-faqs-relating-to-covid-19>

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Appendix C: Checklists

Lakehead University: Start-up Lab Safety Checklist

Room Number(s):

Completed on:

Completed by:

Completed	N/A	
		Survey the laboratory for any unsafe conditions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chemical leaks, spills or releases ● Biological leaks, spills or releases ● Supplies, equipment, glassware or other items left out during shut down ● Manage any expired, outdated, peroxide forming, self-reactive or other reagents with a limited lifespan https://www.lakeheadu.ca/faculty-and-staff/departments/services/hr/health-safety/tb/lab-safety/chemical-safety-program/chemical-safety-resources-for-lab-supervisors/prohibited-and-limited-chemicals-list ● Check expiry date on any antidotes in use in the lab ● Secure, correctly label and/or request a pickup of hazardous wastes ● Manage any biological wastes appropriately
		Review any ongoing experiments that were running during the shut down that could have been affected by loss of electricity, water or other services
		Ensure chemical fume hoods are running
		Ensure biological safety cabinets are functioning properly
		Ensure that all refrigerators, freezers and incubators are functioning properly
		Ensure any essential equipment is functioning properly
		Review equipment operation safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review user manuals for safe startup instructions ● Review equipment state and safely release any stored-up energy (if applicable)
		Complete an operation check on emergency eyewash stations and safety showers. Record check on card provided
		Confirm all chemicals and glassware on bench tops or stored in cabinets are still secured
		Confirm dewars and cryogen containers that were used for sample storage and critical equipment are still filled

	Confirm that storage of perishable items are secured and safe
	Confirm all compressed gas cylinders and regulators are secured and have sufficient quantity available for critical equipment needs
	Confirm stored chemicals, chemical wastes are properly labeled
	Confirm stored biohazards materials are properly labeled
	Ensure all water sources, or circulating water baths etc. are in good condition
	If necessary, restore any backed up, secure data
	Consider whether upcoming experiments will be easily halted should another shut down be required/imposed
	Check lab's supply of liquid soap and paper towels for hand hygiene

Any other concerns noted in the visual inspections:

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Supervisor, retain a copy of this completed checklist for your records. If you require assistance with completing, please contact labsafety@lakeheadu.ca

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Lakehead University: Laboratory Physical Distancing Checklist

Room Number(s):

Completed on:

Completed by:

Supervisors, prior to opening the lab for personnel, consider and communicate the following measures:

Completed	N/A
	Schedule a meeting with your personnel to discuss new operating procedures in the lab, physical distancing measures, working alone procedures (if required). This meeting should be conducted by virtual means
	<p>Consider essential operations/experiments in order to minimize the number of research team members who need to access the laboratory at any one time, to ensure that all personnel can continue to practice physical distancing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Staggering schedules of lab personnel, noting that working alone situations must be managed safely. Breaks and lunch periods should also be staggered ● Creating “teams” of lab personnel that will access the lab at the same time to minimize the number of different contacts an individual may have. This would reduce the number of people impacted in a research group should one individual be positive for CoVid-19 ● Adding visual reminders to the space, 2 m markings on the floor around heavily used equipment. Post hand hygiene, cough etiquette, staying home when sick posters in a prominent place in the lab. ● Relocating equipment and reconfiguring workstations, where possible, to support physical distancing ● Establishing a uni-directional workflow (one way paths for movement within the lab), where possible. ● Address pinch points which may include entrance/exit doors etc.
	Ensure you have an adequate supply of PPE to support your lab activities. Note that supply chain issues have been encountered for PPE and other consumables. Do not plan to start work for which you no longer have adequate supplies of PPE
	<p>Ensure all members have completed all required safety training to work in the lab. Ask for copies of certificates, e.g. 2019/2020 WHMIS, laboratory safety, Health and Safety Awareness, Safety orientation (for new personnel only), and 2020 Biosafety Emergency Refresher (biohazard labs only). All training is available online</p> <p>https://www.lakeheadu.ca/faculty-and-staff/departments/services/hr/health-safety/tb/training</p>
	Encourage team members to access the labs and their offices spaces only when necessary and for the minimum amount of time

	<p>Implement appropriate disinfection of equipment and common surfaces. For example, using an appropriate disinfectant, wipe down the following at the beginning of use and before the end of use on a given day or before its use by another person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Equipment surfaces ● Bench tops ● Faucets ● Fume hood sash and workspace ● Door handles ● Telephones
	<p>Pour water down all sinks or any floor drains that may have dried out and may allow sewer gas smells into the lab (often confused with natural gas leaks)</p>
	<p>Strongly encourage your personnel to stay home if feeling unwell, and when they do attend the lab, wash their hands upon arriving and when leaving</p>
	<p>Consider which equipment requires recalibration/recertification before use</p>

Any other concerns noted by yourself or personnel:



Supervisor, retain a copy of this completed checklist for your records. If you require assistance with completing, please contact labsafety@lakeheadu.ca