

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY RETURN TO RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Overarching Goal: To keep the entire Kent State University family safe, while increasing research activity as safety becomes easier to maintain.

In the remaining text the term “researcher” refers broadly to individuals engaged in all forms of scholarship including, but not limited to, animal and human research, bench research, field research, and creative activities. Further, a “research group leader (RGL)” is one who oversees research trainees/staff and/or the operations of a given lab or studio. “Close contact” is defined as being within 6 feet of an infected person for at least 15 min starting from two days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic patients, two days prior to specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated.

If, at any time, you have been in close contact with someone with confirmed or presumptive COVID-19 or you experience any symptoms consistent with COVID-19:

- 1. STAY HOME – even if you think the symptoms stem from another illness/disease (e.g., shortness of breath due to asthma or allergies) it is best to be conservative and stay home.**
- 2. Call the COVID-19 Response Team at the DeWeese Health Center at 330-672-2525 to determine whether you meet criteria for probable (presumptive) COVID-19.**
- 3. Call your supervisor/chair/dean or whoever oversees your lab space. Inform them that you are sick and are staying home (you may provide greater detail if you like).**

Exceptions for PPE/physical distancing may be made where safety could be influenced by those requirements (e.g., “do not work alone” policy, IRB requirement to have two researchers present for participant safety). Any such exceptions should be clearly identified in your Research Operation Plan, will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and must be approved by the Risk Mitigation subcommittee of the Pandemic Committee.

Requests to Return to Research (both on- and off-campus) forms are available at:

https://nam03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fkent.qualtrics.com%2Fife%2Fform%2FSV_bxxeQG6omudjQ4B&data=02%7C01%7Cddelahan%40kent.edu%7C9c7f5dfe377642fec39708d80f2fe1bd%7Ce5a06f4a1ec44d018f73e7dd15f26134%7C1%7C0%7C637276045610737627&data=vmIT6k0egCICeLUkHk4qqs35h%2F4MfG4DEqGKKY5Qyl0%3D&reserved=0

As of 5/12/2021, all research and creative activities that can be conducted while adhering to the **Flashes Safe Eight** may return, following all physical distance and safety requirements and your approved Return to Research Operation Plan.

Research operation plans must follow physical distancing, safety guidelines, and timing schedules and must be approved by your Chair/Director and/or Dean.

- 1. Researchers, students, and staff who can work remotely should continue to work remotely.**
- 2. Physical distancing required for all research spaces:** Keep a minimum 3-feet (0.9m) distance between you and any colleague unless doing so creates a personal safety

hazard. With regard to the number of people who can be in a research space, there can be no more than one person per 113 sq. ft. of lab space (consistent with a 6 ft. radius per person). Fume hoods may create special situations regarding airflow and require greater distances between individuals. Space guidelines are intended to indicate a maximum density; simply stated, it is safer to have fewer people in any given space.

Similarly, the 3-feet linear distance is an absolute minimum; greater space between colleagues should be maintained, if possible.

These new 3-feet linear and 113 sq.ft./person density rules impact different types of research differently:

- A. Researchers **who have already been approved to return to research for a specific project under the prior 6-feet linear and 250sq.ft./person density rules** (that did not require an approved mitigation plan) may simply adapt the new 3-feet physical distancing rule (113 sq.ft./person density) without seeking additional approvals. However, any new researchers/staff/students being added to a project must continue to be added to the Return to Research Operation Plan and sign the Return to Research Terms and Conditions form.
 - B. Researchers **who are interested in conducting new projects that could have previously adhered to the 6-feet linear/250 sq.ft. density rules** but would now like to have their project reviewed in terms of the new 3-feet linear and 113 sq.ft./person density rules must submit a Return to Research Operation Plan for approval.
 - C. Researchers **who previously could not adhere to the 6-feet linear/250 sq.ft. density rules but believe they can adhere to the new 3-feet linear/ 113 sq.ft. density rules** need to first apply to the risk mitigation committee prior to submitting a Return to Research Operation plan for approval.
 - D. **Researchers with a current approved research *mitigation plan* must continue to follow that mitigation plan as written.** Changes to the plan in response to the new 3-feet linear (113 sq.ft./person density) rules require a new application to the research mitigation committee prior to submitting a Return to Research Operation Plan. Approval by the Risk Mitigation subcommittee does not indicate approval to return to research; return to research requests must be approved by Chairs/Directors and/or Deans.
3. As new staff and students are returning to or starting research/creative activities, **RGLs must ensure** that they are added to their Research Operation Plan, and that all have completed and signed the appropriate **Return to Research Terms and Conditions** form.
 4. **Visitors** that adhere to the Flashes Safe Eight are permitted.

What to do if a Lab/Studio Member has been in close contact with someone with confirmed or presumptive COVID-19 OR has COVID-19 consistent symptoms.

As above, if you have been in close contact with someone with confirmed or presumptive COVID-19 or you experience any symptoms consistent with COVID-19:

1. **STAY HOME** – even if you think the symptoms stem from another illness/disease (e.g., shortness of breath due to asthma or allergies) it is best to be conservative and stay home.
2. **Call the COVID-19 Response Team** at the DeWeese Health Center at 330-672-2525 to determine whether you meet criteria for probable (presumptive) COVID-19 and follow their recommendations.
3. **Call your supervisor/chair/dean or whoever oversees your lab space.** Inform them that you are sick and are staying home (you may provide greater detail if you like).

If and when the COVID response team approves your return to work/school:

1. Inform your supervisor and return to work. You may not return to work without the COVID response team's approval.

If you are determined to have probable/presumptive COVID-19:

1. Inform your supervisor/chair/dean and the Vice President of Research (Paul DiCorleto: dcorlp@kent.edu). This can be done in one email. The COVID response team will also be contacting supervisors.
2. Work with the public health office and the COVID response team to facilitate contact tracing efforts.

Off-campus Travel for Research/Creative Activity

Research and creative activity requiring off-campus travel requires approval of the Request to Return to Off-campus Research Form and the Return to Research Terms and Conditions Forms, as described above. The Request to Return to Off-Campus Research Form must address the off-campus activities, travel arrangements, and on-campus activities as necessary.

1. Individuals traveling off-campus to do research must investigate and assess the infectious disease risk (phase) of the destination where the research is to be performed, as well as areas that must be traveled through to reach the destination. State and local government physical distancing and PPE recommendations must be strictly followed during travel.
2. **Domestic travel** requires a Request to Return to Research Plan to be written and evaluated in light of [CDC travel guidelines](https://www.cdc.gov/travel) and state of Ohio travel advisories and quarantine requirements (<https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/families-and-individuals/COVID-19-Travel-Advisory/COVID-19-Travel-Advisory>). Anyone returning from a state reporting positive testing rates of 15% or higher must contact the COVID Response Team (330-672-2525).
3. **International travel** will be evaluated on the basis of [CDC travel recommendations by country](https://www.cdc.gov/travel) and must follow [CDC international travel guidelines](https://www.cdc.gov/travel). Anyone returning from international travel must contact the COVID Response Team (330-672-2525).
4. Approved travel plans should be understood to be contingent on a stable situation, to be revised if the situation changes.
5. Physical distancing requirements (and other Flashes Safe Eight guidelines) described above must be maintained during travel and field work. Approvals for off-campus travel follow the same approval processes regarding the new 3-feet linear and 113 sq.ft./person density rules as stated above.

6. Regardless of destination, PPE including masks, gloves, and hand-washing supplies should be made available to any individual engaging in field research because these may be required during research or travel (e.g., using gas pumps or restrooms).
7. Individuals traveling off-campus to do research on property owned by another organization must obtain permission from the external organization to restart activities.
8. Departure and return from travel should be communicated with the RGL and logged in a calendar.
9. Trips to on-campus laboratories may be necessary to pick up supplies or enter samples into specialized storage (e.g., -80°C freezers). These trips must be authorized by your department Chair or Director (depending on who oversees operations in the building or facility your group operates in) and follow all guidelines described above.

Outdoor Research/Creative Activities

Approvals for outdoor research/creative activities follow the same approval processes regarding the new 3-feet linear and 113 sq.ft./person density rules as stated above. However, physical distancing within groups outdoors may be facilitated due to reduced density of people, greater ability to modify movement patterns to maintain physical distancing, and lack of community high-touch objects. Outdoor research is usually performed by at least pairs of people as a safety precaution. Working outdoors still requires strict vigilance and adherence to guidelines to reduce risks.