

A message from Professor Lori Ferris, Associate Vice-President, Research (Oversight and Compliance) (January 5, 2022)

As of January 5, 2022, the province of Ontario has returned to a modified version of Step Two of the [Roadmap to Reopen](#) framework. In line with this and other recent provincial announcements, a number of measures have been implemented by the University to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in light of the new [Omicron variant of concern](#).

On-Campus Research and Research Space

At this time, and until Monday January 31, 2022 the University is requiring the following:

- All research work that can be conducted remotely must be done remotely, and researchers may only work on campus if the nature of the work requires them to be on-site. Faculty should work with their teams to reduce on-campus presence to the extent possible.
- At least 2-metre physical distancing within a research space (e.g. within a lab). In addition, to help address building capacity, no research space should exceed 65% of normal occupancy levels.
- For collaborative spaces (e.g. open research spaces with multiple PIs), at least 2-metre physical distancing is required, however the 65% normal occupancy level can be on the basis of the floor rather than a research space. Implementation of floor-wide occupancy will be the responsibility of the local Chair or Director, with decisions taking into account local conditions.
- Where physical distancing cannot be maintained due to the nature of the research activity, please [contact EHS](#) for an assessment if you don't already have a plan in place that includes additional measures that can be taken (e.g. modification of activity, personal protective equipment, etc).

Laboratories should prepare for the possibility of staffing disruptions and shortages as a result of the new Omicron variant including having contingency plans in place for all critical experiments and equipment maintenance.

For those conducting on-campus research please ensure you are following your academic division's current processes and other information provided by the division concerning this message. Divisional processes are based on the [University of Toronto Approach for Research Recovery and Adaptation](#) and the [COVID-19 General Workplace Guidelines \(GWG\)](#).

We understand that many of our research spaces are already operating at reduced capacity as many researchers are now conducting their activities remotely. Please remember that if you are planning to come to campus you are required to complete the [UCheck](#) screening **before** coming on site, and follow the directions if you receive a red status.

Human Participant Research

1. Given the increased levels of community transmission and the risk for human participants, for research that was approved by the University's Research Ethics Board (REB), from now and until at least Monday January 31, 2022, the University is requiring the following:
2. Face-to-face (F2F, in-person) research involving human participants is now paused except for exceptional situations listed below.
3. The pausing of research should follow the emergency stop plans, stated in the approved F2F request forms, which can be found in the Documents Summary section (#13) of the REB-approved ethics protocol.

This required pause includes all current in-person recruitment of human participants, in-person data collection involving human participants for on-going research, and studies involving human participants that have recently received REB approval. **Online and virtual research may continue.**

Exceptions to the requirement to pause:

- COVID-19 research;

- Research where the U of T REB is the Board of Record and the study involves in-person research where the participant is receiving a service that would be delivered/received regardless of the research. Please contact the Human Research Ethics Unit at ethics.review@utoronto.ca for confirmation that your research falls into this category;
- Where the U of T REB is not the Board of Record (e.g. a TAHSN REB is the Board of Record), researchers should follow the applicable direction of that institution (assuming the in-person research is not on a U of T campus);
- Researchers currently in other provinces or countries conducting U of T REB-approved in-person research may continue, as long as they follow all applicable public health directives and safety measures of that jurisdiction. If you have any questions/concerns regarding safety while conducting in-person research, please contact EHS.office@utoronto.ca.

Protocol amendments and approvals:

F2F protocols with previously REB-approved amendments for online or virtual research may pivot back immediately. New amendments to pivot to online or virtual methodologies will be reviewed, and all renewals and protocol completion reports will continue to be reviewed to ensure that protocols remain in good standing.

While F2F research is currently paused except for the exceptions noted above, the REB will continue to review requests for F2F research. However, final approval for these requests will not be granted until public health conditions improve. More information can be found on the [Review Of Face-To-Face \(F2F\) Human Participant and Off-Campus Research](#) page.

Off-Campus Research

Researchers who wish to conduct research at an off-campus site or conduct on-site field research (e.g. Koffler Scientific Reserve, Hart House Farm, Gull Lake) that does not involve any human participant face-to-face (F2F) research components are encouraged to review the University's [Guidance on Research and Travel During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) and the [Off-Campus Safety Planning Record](#). It is the researcher's responsibility to follow all local public health and third-party location

requirements. Local public health requirements may differ from Toronto/Peel/Ontario requirements.

Given the rapidly changing situation with the Omicron variant, we will be updating our [webpage](#) as conditions change. We encourage our research community to visit the website frequently for updates.

International Travel

As of December 15, 2021, all university sanctioned activities outside of Canada are [cancelled](#) for U of T students, until further notice. If you are a PhD student looking to conduct thesis related research outside of Canada, please defer your travel. Otherwise, please contact safety.abroad@utoronto.ca to discuss options.

The federal government's [advisory to avoid all non-essential international travel](#) may pose issues for researchers who are planning research trips internationally or who may currently be doing research outside Canada. Please continue to stay updated on [travel information](#).

Conclusion

I know these are difficult times and I want to again thank our research community for its incredible dedication to following the University and public health guidelines and directives in an effort to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Please continue to watch this page for updates.