COVID-19 Field/off-campus work SAFETY Plan Template for research with human participants

# Introduction

This is a safety plan template and is based upon the hierarchy of controls model of risk management. The premise is to prioritize and implement controls that are known to be most effective (removing/eliminating exposure vs using PPE). The image in Figure 1 depicts this model using COVID-19 specific controls.

Least Effective

Most Effective

**Figure 1: Hierarchy of controls as it applies to COVID-19**

# Purpose

This document has been designed to assist principal investigators and researchers in establishing appropriate protocols to minimize risk for field/off-campus work occurring in-person with human participants during COVID-19. Off campus human participant research applies to studies conducted in locations other than UWaterloo campuses and includes but is not limited to the following:

* Public spaces (parks, streets, town squares)
* Private indoor and outdoor settings (homes, properties, offices, businesses)
* Spaces under the jurisdiction or authority of an organization or entity (e.g., schools, community centers, other post-secondary institutions, government offices, etc.)
* Health facilities and clinics under the authority of a health authority, hospital, health region
* Lands and facilities under the authority of an Indigenous nation(s) or controlled access community (e.g., Mennonite community)

# Instructions for use

Sections in Part A do not require any data to be submitted, they may be left blank. All sections in Part B must be completed.

To use this template, **insert your instructions in the relevant sections.** Once complete, review with all fieldwork employees, supervisors, students, and relevant persons at the host site/location(s).

Review involves going through the processes you have established and getting acknowledgement from all members of the work/research group and relevant persons at the host site/location(s) that they understand and will comply with the plan.

**Notes**

* Develop one plan per fieldwork project
* A [Fieldwork Risk Management Form](https://uwaterloo.ca/safety-office/occupational-health-safety/fieldwork) must also be approved
* You will need to obtain acknowledgement from all fieldwork employees, supervisors, and students
* You will need to sign the plan at the end signifying that you will enact the plan as outlined as well as be accountable for enforcing this plan
* At minimum, all fieldwork/off-campus research safety plans should contain the following elements:
  + Activities that do not require in-person interactions with study participants are to be done remotely
  + Meetings or contacts with study participants to arrange visits, complete questionnaires, and consent should be held virtually or by phone
  + Suitable pandemic safety precautions must be in place at all times, including physical distancing and hand hygiene
  + You will need to understand and demonstrate in this plan how you intend on meeting the COVID-19 protocols for any region/province community, and or organization that you will be visiting. Please reference these where applicable. If requirements differ between the those used here at UW, and another location, you are expected to the more prescriptive requirements.
  + All research must be conducted in accordance with applicable safety requirements and best practices
  + No operation or fieldwork should be carried out without adequate training and supervision
  + The [Working Alone Guideline](https://uwaterloo.ca/safety-office/occupational-health-safety/working-alone-guideline) must be followed when deploying employees or students in any operation or fieldwork
  + Fieldwork requiring use of a boat is not permitted unless physical distancing of at least two meters can be maintained
  + Travel to, or in proximity to, Indigenous communities or on Indigenous land to undertake field research is normally not permitted
  + International travel is not permitted, including to the USA,and [domestic travel](https://uwaterloo.ca/coronavirus/health-and-travel-guidance#travel) will be assessed on a case-by-case basis
  + Permissions must be obtained and be current for use of off-campus locations or facilities (e.g., businesses, organizations, field stations, greenhouses, farms, municipal land) by the authority responsible for these locations or facilities
    - These updated permissions will need to be in place before your field work research request is given final approval
    - Respect the wishes to limit visitors to and from these areas
    - Permission to access national and provincial parks must be obtained from the relevant authorities
  + Appropriate precautions must be in place and documented to protect employees, students, and the larger community
  + Limit interaction with the general public
  + Avoid sharing equipment
  + The designation and frequency for cleaning of equipment, vehicles, field stations and other high-touch surfaces
  + An outline of when non-medical masks are required

PART A

# 1.0 Employee Training

Before performing fieldwork or coming back to campus, employees, students, and researchers must complete the following training:

* Mandatory [“Return to Campus Safety during COVID-19” (SO 2036)](https://uwaterloo.ca/safety-office/training/returning-campus-safely-during-covid-19) online training
* Training from the PI on the new practices outlined in this procedure

# 2.0 Responsibilities

## 2.1 Supervisor

* Develop this plan to meet [Health & Safety Guidance during COVID-19](https://uwaterloo.ca/coronavirus/return-campus/workplace-health-and-safety-guidance) and any requirements for any host site(s) or location(s) being visited.
* Prior to deployment, meet with your employees, students, and research team prior to starting fieldwork. Orientation shall cover all items within this plan.
* Prior to deployment, discuss the requirements of this plan with relevant contact person(s) at the host site(s) or location(s).
* Enforce all criteria within this plan.
* Ensure appropriate hand hygiene and surface disinfection supplies are provided to all fieldwork employees, students, and research team.
* Actively review site/location pandemic and travel advisories in case adjustments to research protocols must be made.
* Review this plan at least monthly to:
  + Identify hazards as per the Occupational Health and Safety Act
  + Ensure the adequacy and adherence to this safety plan.

## 2.2 Employees and Students

* Follow all guidance within this plan.
* Notify their supervisor if supplies are not sufficient to maintain hand hygiene and surface decontamination requirements.
* Notify their supervisor of any hazards that are discovered while working.
* Do not conduct field/off-campus work if ill and report all illnesses using the process outlined in section 3.2 Illness and Absence Reporting.

# 3.0 Health Protocols

## 3.1 Self-Assessment Screening

To minimize risk, it is imperative that employees and students do not come to campus or conduct field/off-campus work when ill. For this reason, the University requires that employees and students monitor themselves daily for symptoms of COVID-19. The COVID-19 self-assessment tool, found in the [WatSAFE app](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/watsafe) and on the [University’s Health Protocols site](https://uwaterloo.ca/coronavirus/health-and-travel-guidance), provides clear directions on how to self-assess.

## 3.2 Illness and Absence Reporting

Do not participate in fieldwork or allow a member of your team to participate if exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms. Review and follow the [University’s Health Protocols](https://uwaterloo.ca/coronavirus/return-campus/workplace-health-and-safety-guidance/health-protocols) at all times.

# 4.0 Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene should be performed regularly throughout the day. At minimum, fieldwork employees, supervisors, students, and study participants shall wash hands or perform hand sanitization:

* After using the washroom, before eating, and when finished work for the day
* When they remove gloves
* After using shared equipment

Hand washing is the preferred method of hand hygiene. If hands are soiled (dirt, debris, oils, grease, and other contaminants), hand sanitizers will not be effective. Use soap and warm water in these cases. If work consistently causes hands to be soiled, hand washing facilities need to be provided and accessible (portable water jug/sink and soap).

Communicate these requirements to your employees and students before they embark on field/off-campus work.

# 5.0 Personal PRotective Equipment (PPE)

Physical distancing must be implemented whenever possible. However, even when practicing physical distancing, all researchers and participants must both wear ASTM Level 2 medical masks for the duration of the study. There will only be limited situations where removal of a participant’s mask may be permitted. In order to determine if this is permissible, please provide details of any proposed mask removal in your study design.

In addition, when 2m cannot be maintained between persons interacting for more than 15 minutes (cumulatively over a period of 24 hours), protective eyewear (in addition to masking) is strongly recommended. The reasoning for this is as follows: if one of the persons interacting tests positive, the other individual is considered a “high risk close contact” when eye protection is not worn. High risk close contacts must go through stricter self-monitoring and isolation procedures than contacts.

5.1 Exception for Participant Masking

If research involves children below the age of 3, masking is not recommended by public health. In this situation, researchers must wear N95 masks and protective eyewear when work requires the researcher to be within 2m of the child. For school aged children in grade 3 or below, masking is encouraged but not mandatory. Should these children not tolerate masks (fidgeting and constant touching), the researcher should wear an N95 mask and protective eyewear when within 2m of the child. If a researcher is required to wear an N95 mask, they will require fit testing. The researcher is advised to contact the Safety Office for this.

5.2 Other Protective Equipment

* Gloves are required where there is human contact. Gloves shall not be used in hallways (this rule has not changed).
* Eye protection can include appropriate safety glasses/goggles or a face shield (available via [Central Stores](https://uwaterloo.ca/central-stores/central-stores-service-stock-catalogue#ClothFaceMasks)) and must:
  + Fit properly and not interfere with the proper fit of a mask
  + Provide a barrier to splashes from the side
  + Not create an additional hazard in relation to the type of work being performed

Face shields, safety glasses and safety goggles must be individually provided and wiped with a disinfectant before and after each use.

* Aprons should be wiped with disinfectant before and after each use.
* Shared computers should have plastic keyboard covers and be wiped with disinfectant before and after each use.
* Lab coats are required for any work involving human participant research. Lab coat use must follow these requirements:
  + Lab coats shall be designated to an individual and NOT shared
  + Lab coats shall be stored in the laboratory in which they are used
  + At a minimum, lab coats shall be washed if they are visibly soiled, known to have been contaminated, or have been used while cleaning up fluids/materials of biological origin. If none of the above apply, lab coats shall be washed after 10 uses.
  + Lab coats may be used for multiple participants provided none of the above have occurred.
* Scrubs may be used in place of lab coats provided the following criteria are used:
  + Scrubs shall be designated to an individual and not shared.
  + Street clothes are worn to the facility, then the individual changes into their scrubs once on-site. Once the study work for the day is complete, the individual will change back into their street clothes and place the scrubs into a plastic bag for transport and laundering.
  + At a minimum, scrubs shall be washed after each day of use. If the scrubs have been visibly soiled, known to have been contaminated, or have been used while cleaning up fluids/materials of biological origin, they shall be changed immediately, and placed into a plastic bag for transport and washing.
  + Scrubs may be used for multiple participants provided none of the above have occurred.
* Researchers are to wear surgical masks, face shields, lab coats or disposable gowns, and gloves for studies that involve taking biological fluids (e.g., spit, blood, other bodily fluids) and the participants are to wear Level 2 masks.

PART B

**Principal Investigator:**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Field/Off-campus Location:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# 1.0 Adjust the workplace - Physical Distancing

* Outline the plan to ensure that 2m physical distancing can be maintained in the field or when off-campus.
  + Include distancing between fieldwork employees, supervisors and students, between study participants and local contacts, and the public.
* Outline safety measures to ensure fieldwork employees, supervisors and students travel safely to and from the field site(s)/study location(s).
* Outline safety measures if accommodations are required, including how fieldwork employees, supervisors and students will be separated with respect to:
* Sleeping quarters
* Washroom facilities
* Meal plans, including food preparation and eating (e.g., how will these plans protect fieldwork employees, students, research team, and the community?)

**Describe your plan here.** Note any specific measures regarding GPE that need to be addressed for the work/study conditions.

Click or tap here to enter text.

## 1.1 Activities with / by study participants

Please describe in detail the nature of all activities involved in the study that involve interaction with participants. Be as specific as possible. Be clear which activities if any require a researcher being in close proximity (within 2m) of a participant and provide an estimate of the duration. Activities that require close proximity should be minimized.

Click or tap here to enter text.

**Total** estimated cumulative time in close contact: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# 2.0 Surface Decontamination

Surface decontamination of work areas and equipment is the responsibility of the supervisor or PI. At minimum, most surfaces should be disinfected twice per day. Fill out the sections below to outline decontamination plans.

## 2.1 SHARED equipment Decontamination

Complete the table below regarding the disinfection details for the shared equipment (including vehicles) when in the field/off-campus activities.

**Table 1: Shared equipment disinfection details**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Equipment Identifier** | **Disinfectant** | **Concentration** | **Contact time** | **Frequency of disinfection** |
| Equipment used with and by employees |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
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Notes on surface disinfection:

* Ensure the disinfectant chosen is appropriate for the surface being disinfected.
* Ensure there is enough disinfectant to last for the course of the fieldwork.
* All work surfaces should be decontaminated twice daily. In most situations, this means before work begins and once work has concluded.

## 2.2 High-touch area Decontamination (indoor areas)

All high-touch surfaces should be disinfected twice daily. Designate responsible persons and a schedule for this to be done. Complete the table below.

**Table 2: High touch surface disinfection summary table.**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Item Identifier** | **Disinfectant** | **Responsible Person** | **Schedule** | **Frequency of disinfection** |
| Doorknobs, cupboard handles, kitchen appliances |  |  |  |  |
| Faucets and washroom fixtures |  |  |  |  |
| Light switches |  |  |  |  |
| Vehicle steering wheel, door handles |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

[Click here](https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet-covid-19-environmental-cleaning.pdf?la=en) for more information on the disinfection of surfaces:

# 3.0 contingency plan

All field/off-campus work is required to have a contingency plan. This must describe actions that will be taken if a fieldwork employee, supervisor, or student has symptoms of COVID-19, tests positive for COVID-19, or is required to self-isolate. It must include actions to be taken if a study participant has symptoms of COVID-19 or tests positive for COVID-19. It also includes the need to immediately respond to University, regional or provincial directions to cease field/off-campus work operations. Responsibility must be assigned to individuals within your group to ensure that field/off-campus work can be safely and appropriately scaled back or stopped on short notice, including travel and accommodation needs. Ensure you reference any requirement of the Region, Province, or area you are in if they are different than the ones used at Waterloo.

**Describe your contingency plan here:**

Click or tap here to enter text.

# 4.0 Acknowledgements

**Field/off-campus employee, supervisor and student acknowledgements**

By printing and signing my name in the table below, I acknowledge that I have been trained on the procedures outlined in this document, that I have been consulted and have no reservations with the safety precautions and processes that will be in place to conduct research described in the request to conduct fieldwork.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Employee Name** | **Signature** | **Date** |
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**Principal Investigator acknowledgement**

I acknowledge that I am responsible for the implementation of all procedures outlined in this document to reduce infection risk of COVID-19. Those found not following these directives will be subjected to corrective action up to and including disciplinary measures.

**Principal Investigator name:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Principal Investigator signature:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_