Guidance on Research and Travel During the COVID-19 Pandemic

This checklist provides guidance to faculty, staff and students* conducting either research or off-campus travel (local, provincial or international) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Off-campus travel includes travel to conferences, workshops, etc. The general expectation is for this guidance to be followed where applicable. If faculty, staff or students are NOT able to follow this guidance, please contact EHS (ehs.office@utoronto.ca) for assistance.

Given that Global Affairs Canada has changed the world-wide travel advisory to “avoid non-essential”, as of December 15, 2021, all university sanctioned activities outside of Canada are cancelled for U of T students, until further notice. For additional updates from the university related to COVID-19, please visit the VP Students COVID-19 FAQ page. PhD students may be granted an exception if the completion of their research/dissertation will be significantly impacted. PhD students must contact the Safety Abroad Office (safety.abroad@utoronto.ca) to discuss if this exception applies.

If conducting face-to-face research, please complete and submit the Face-to-Face (F2F) Human Participant COVID-19 Risk Assessment. For more information, please refer to the Review of Face-to-Face and Off-Campus Research.

Workflow/Scheduling/Physical Distancing

1. The activity should be evaluated to determine that it must take place in-person.
2. Where applicable, measures outlined in General Assessment Tool and the COVID-19 General Workplace Guideline should be reviewed and applied, including but not limited to the section on vehicles, cleaning and disinfection, physical distancing, etc.
3. Where the location is operated/owned/leased by UofT, signage identified in the General Assessment Tool should be posted. If it is a third-party site, the researchers should be informed of the site’s procedures ahead of time.
4. Physical distancing (2m or per local public health requirements) should be maintained at all times. If physical distancing cannot be maintained, procedures should be upgraded to include the use of personal protective equipment (medical mask and eye protection). Eye protection generally means goggles or face shields. Some types of activities (e.g. aerosol generating medical procedures) may require different PPE (e.g. N95s). These should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. For assistance, please contact ehs.office@utoronto.ca. Note: use of a NIOSH-approved N95 respirator requires respiratory fit testing and successful completion of online training.
5. If applicable, the UofT Working Alone Guidelines should be reviewed and implemented where applicable.

Health Screening

6. Self-screening should be conducted daily using UCheck for UofT owned/leased/operated locations or the third-party’s own daily health screening for other locations. If the third-party location does not have a health screening tool, the local public health unit’s screening tool OR the Ontario COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool should be used.
Vaccination

7. Each team member who is travelling should fully comply with vaccination requirements per the UofT Joint Provostial and Human Resources Guideline on Vaccination and if applicable, with local requirements for vaccination host/destination location.

Contact Tracing and Emergency procedures

8. Processes should be in place to collect information for contact tracing (i.e. list of individuals, contact information, when the in-person interaction took place and where). If located in a non-UofT owned/operated/leased location, it should be confirmed that the third-party location has notification processes in place in the event of a confirmed COVID-19 case.

9. Procedures should be followed as outlined in Procedures in the Event of a UCheck red screen, Confirmed Case and/or COVID-19 Symptoms. The UofT occupational health team (ehs.occhealth@utoronto.ca) should be contacted in the event of any COVID-19 exposure.

10. Given the uncertainty of the pandemic, an emergency plan should be in place for the orderly winding down of activities, for isolation and quarantine if asked to do so by local public health, and for transportation arrangements home if any member of team becomes ill.

11. Contact information for local healthcare providers at the host/destination location should be documented.

Masks and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

12. At minimum, a non-medical mask* should be worn at all times (see above, section titled ‘Workflow/Scheduling/Physical Distancing’ if physical distancing cannot be maintained) during the activities/travel and instructions on non-medical masks is reviewed. *Also refer to local public health authority.

13. If medical masks and eye protection are used, instructions should be reviewed: https://ehs.utoronto.ca/medical_mask/ and https://ehs.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/COVID-19-Eye-Protection-Tipsheet.pdf. Where applicable, manufacturer instructions should also be reviewed.

Hygiene, Cleaning and Disinfection

14. Hand washing facilities (soap and water) and/or hand sanitizer area should be available at the site. Proper hand washing and hand sanitization techniques should be followed.

15. Where possible, individual equipment, tools, workstation, surfaces, etc. should be used to reduce sharing. If not possible, shared equipment and surfaces should be disinfected before use.
16. Disinfectants that are used should have a DIN from Health Canada; in other jurisdictions, disinfectants should be used in accordance with local public health guidance.

Communication/Supervision/Compliance

17. This guidance and any other relevant procedures and processes should be communicated to all members of the team (if applicable). This includes information regarding travel requirements and precautions to follow during travel.

18. If the research is being led by undergraduate* or graduate students* or post-doctoral fellows, procedures should be in place to supervise the student/fellow directly or indirectly (e.g., frequent visits to the space by supervisor, debrief before and after the work shift, direct contact with the supervisor by phone/email, assigning a lead for each shift). *Please note that there is a general international travel moratorium for students until Dec. 31, 2021.

19. Processes should be in place to report and to follow up on non-compliance with COVID-19 measures (e.g., not following physical distancing, not wearing a mask) and this should be communicated to the team. Where applicable, the supervisor (academic or administrative) will work with other UofT parties (or third parties for non-UofT locations) to address non-compliance.

Travel

20. The following should be done before travelling:
   a. Review all local public health requirements at the location (e.g., physical distancing, capacity limits, masks, health screening, etc.). Individuals travelling should be prepared to meet all legal and public health requirements of the location in which the travel is to take place.
   b. The infection rate in the community or region should be reviewed and considered when determining the need to travel and the precautions required during the travel.
   c. Each person should confirm their ability to enter the region or country and should prepare for any mandatory quarantine period (away and home) and associated requirements. Additional costs incurred by the researchers during mandatory quarantine or other COVID-19 related costs (e.g. repatriation) in/from the host country/location will be borne by the researchers.
   d. For domestic travel, review the Government of Canada’s Provincial and Territorial Restrictions webpage.
   e. Review the UofT memo on International travel in the course of university business including registering for International SOS.
   f. Check the Government of Canada’s Pandemic COVID-19 website and the Health tab for the research destination in the Travel Advice and Advisories.
   g. Review the World Health Organization’s Coronavirus (COVID-19) Travel Advice website.
   h. Review the vaccination and quarantine requirements (if any) for COVID-19 and other diseases (e.g., Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, malaria) as applicable at the host and home country/location to ensure that these requirements can be met.
i. Ensure awareness of any pandemic-related implications to travel insurance coverage under Green Shield Canada.

j. For out-of-country travel, where applicable, contact the Safety Abroad Office prior to departure, noting country of departure/return.

Health precautions, guidelines and advice per the resources above should be followed.

21. Large crowds or crowded areas should be avoided.
22. Contact with sick people should be avoided, especially if they have a cough, fever or difficulty breathing.
23. In the event of illness abroad:
   a. The advice and instructions of local public health authorities should be followed.
   b. Medical attention should be sought, if required.
   c. The closest Government of Canada office should be contacted if consular assistance is required.

Other Safety Hazards

24. The Off-Campus Safety Planning Record (Risk Assessment) should be reviewed and procedures should be implemented to mitigate other travel or excursion related hazards (e.g. remote locations, extreme weather, wildlife, etc.).