



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY
HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER™
EL PASO

Office of the Vice President for Research

March 21, 2020

Dear TTUHSC El Paso Community,

This is to update you on our university's **research continuity plans** in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Please continue to monitor the TTUHSC El Paso COVID-19 site for guidance on health concerns and their impact on university operations, including research: <https://ttuhscelp.edu/coronavirus/secure/default.aspx>. In addition, ongoing guidance will be provided on the university's main research page: <https://elpaso.ttuhsc.edu/research/>.

The health and safety of students, staff, faculty and research participants remains our top priority. With this in mind, the research administrative support services provided by the Office of the Vice President for Research (OVPR) will remain operational to the fullest extent possible. To protect human health and minimize the spread of the virus, nearly all OVPR staff are now working remotely. Essential *on-campus* research functions also remain operational, albeit with minimal on-site staffing. Those functions include the Laboratory Animal Research Center (LARC), building/laboratory services and essential on-site research activities. Further details are provided below.

All research operations and projects will continue to maintain compliance with federal, state and agency regulations. We are continuing to monitor changes to agency regulations in response to the outbreak, and will communicate those changes through email and website postings.

Animal Research, the LARC, and the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC)

The LARC has adopted contingency plans to adjust to variations in employee staffing, while providing ongoing support for the health of research animals. Those plans have been vetted by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee.

- Current animal husbandry will continue to the fullest extent possible, while prioritizing human health. If LARC staffing were to decrease, animal care practices will be adjusted accordingly. Principal investigators of animal research projects have been notified of these plans and will continue to be updated if staffing changes occur.
- Access to the LARC will follow the same criteria that govern campus and MSB I access. During periods of restricted access, researchers and staff designated as essential on-campus personnel will be able to enter the LARC using the keycard access system.
- In order to focus limited resources and staffing on the care of current research animals, no new animal purchases or inbound animal transfers will be approved at this time.
- The IACUC meeting originally scheduled for April 10 has been cancelled. In the meantime, animal research protocols will be reviewed by designated member review. Future IACUC meetings will be held by videoconference, with updates forthcoming.



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- Any questions and concerns regarding animal research, IACUC or LARC operations should be directed to the appropriate contact person:
Chris Boehm, M.Ed., D.V.M., M.S., Attending Veterinarian and LARC Director: chris.boehm@ttuhsc.edu
Amanda Ortiz, IACUC Lead Analyst: amanda.Ortiz@ttuhsc.edu
Laxman Gangwani, Ph.D., M.Sc., M.Tech., IACUC Chair: laxman.gangwani@ttuhsc.edu

Human Subjects Research and the Institutional Review Board (IRB)

The safety of research participants, staff and study teams is paramount during the COVID-19 outbreak. Therefore, the following adjustments to human subject research and IRB processes have been made:

- The IRB has moved to remote videoconferencing mode and remains operational. The boards will continue to meet according to their normal monthly schedule. Likewise, the IRB administrative support staff are working remotely and can be reached using their usual contact information. Calls to campus phones are being forwarded to mobile numbers.
- **New** human research studies pending IRB approval that involve direct person-to-person interactions with subjects are *on hold* due to COVID-19. New and pending study protocols of this type cannot be approved at this time. Investigators should consider revising their protocols to incorporate remote clinical research monitoring visits by telephone, email or internet-based videoconferencing.
- **Ongoing, IRB-approved** human research studies that involve direct person-to-person interactions with subjects are subject to adjustments and limitations. We are suggesting deferring in-person new study enrollment at this time. Where possible, clinical research monitoring visits should be changed to remote visits by phone, email or video. If there is an urgent need to maintain an in-person visit, please contact the IRB for approval. Research personnel should not engage in person-to-person contacts with research subjects outside of IRB-approved sites. The IRB will continue to reassess the need for these restrictions. *Investigators must be cognizant that continued direct person-to-person visits pose a risk of COVID-19 infection for research subjects and employees.*
- Investigators conducting externally funded (sponsored) human research studies, including industry-sponsored clinical trials, should seek guidance and permission from their sponsors for changes to study protocols and visits.
- The Interim Associate Dean for Clinical Research for the Foster School of Medicine, Navkiran Shokar, M.D., M.P.H., M.A., is individually contacting human subject investigators to assess project issues, needs and concerns. Please direct human research inquiries to her office: navkiran.shokar@ttuhsc.edu.
- Please address IRB inquiries to Myrna Arvizo, Senior Director, Research Committees: myrna.arvizo@ttuhsc.edu or Paul Casner, M.D., IRB Chair: paul.casner@ttuhsc.edu.
- Because of the fluid nature of the outbreak, new guidelines regarding human subject research may be forthcoming. Please continue to monitor the university's Research website <https://el Paso.ttuhsc.edu/research/> and COVID-19 website <https://ttuhsc.edu/coronavirus/secure/default.aspx>.



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Sponsored Projects and Effort Reporting

The Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) remains open and operational, while working remotely. The OSP staff will continue to submit new and revised research grants and contracts during this period. Please follow normal guidelines and processes, and communicate with OSP staff using their regular contact information. Inquiries can be directed to Terry Adame: teresa.adame@ttuhsc.edu or Natalie Nevarez-Straight: natalie.nevarez@ttuhsc.edu.

The disruption to research projects is necessitating a shift in activities for research staff, students and faculty supported by research grants.

- Where possible, principal investigators should reallocate their staff activities in such a way as to maintain current levels of effort on projects. This is a great time to focus on remote data analysis, writing manuscripts, preparing abstracts and presentations, and writing grants. Given the quarterly nature of effort reporting, adjustments should be well documented and justified over that time frame.
- Research personnel who cannot work during this period, or whose activities cannot be adjusted in this way, should consider an Emergency Leave for the COVID-19 pandemic. Please consult with department personnel administrators for information and forms.
- Sponsoring agencies are providing varying degrees of flexibility and guidance regarding effort on projects for those affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. We will post links to agency guidance on the university's research and COVID-19 websites.
- **No matter the situation or circumstances, compliance with effort reporting requirements is mandatory.** Investigators should maintain records that support and justify the expenditure of funds for faculty and staff effort on sponsored projects.

Research Students, Trainees and Volunteers

Students, trainees and volunteers engaged in research projects should communicate with their faculty mentors/principal investigators regarding their level of involvement during this period.

- GSBS students engaged in research should seek guidance from faculty mentors and Jazmin Carrera-Blas, M.B.A., Director, GSBS Dean's Office: jazmin.carrera-blas@ttuhsc.edu.
- Medical students engaged in SARP projects should direct inquiries to their faculty mentors and to Carolyn Mack, D.B.A., Associate Director of the SARP Program: carolyn.mack@ttuhsc.edu.
- Research volunteers are temporarily relieved of their duties and should not report to campus during this outbreak. Please communicate with your supervisors for updates.

Thank you for your patience, understanding and cooperation. Most of all, thank you for your important contributions to our research mission!



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Respectfully yours,

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