



OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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December 4, 2020

Dear colleagues,

As you may have heard and read, the California Department of Public Health issued a new Regional Stay at Home Order on 12/3/20 for counties in which Intensive Care Unit capacities fall below 15%:

<https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/12.3.20-Stay-at-Home-Order-ICU-Scenario.pdf>

As of now, this Order does not require us to make any modification to our currently approved Research Operational Plans and, thanks to the care you have taken, there have been very few cases of virus transmission on our campus involving the research community. Accordingly, we will continue to operate as we have been with approved research operational plans.

*However, if the situation continues to worsen it is possible that we will need to ramp down research activities. **This memo is designed to plan for any such changes that may occur in the near future as we don't want anyone caught unprepared.***

As a reminder, we have two types of research plans— regular Research Operational Plans (ROPs) and Essential Research Plans.

If a Stay At Home Order goes into effect for Merced County, on-campus and field activities related to approved (or under review) ROPs will be able to continue unless we are required to totally ramp down research. As usual, you may amend approved ROPs through [InfoReady](#) to add or delete researchers, so long as the total number of personnel approved to be onsite at a given time does not increase. However, new ROPs will not be approved after that date. Exceptions will be made for plans under review at that time, and in extreme situations (e.g., a new faculty who just arrived and has been awarded a grant/contract and would like to ramp up their research).

If your research fits the definition of *essential research* functions and you do not yet have Essential Researcher designation and a letter to that effect, I encourage you to submit an [Essential Research Request Form](#) so your project can be reviewed in advance of any possible restrictions. Essential research continues even if regular research is curtailed.

Essential research functions are those necessary to maintain baseline research or scholarly operations and projects (e.g. vivarium management, clean room management, etc.) that, if not

continued, will result in irreparable damage to instruments, samples or research programs. Any disruption to an “essential research function” could jeopardize the completion of sponsored projects (even if delayed), the reputation of faculty and the institution with sponsors, the prospects of future funding, and even the research capability itself housed at the institution.

If you have previously been designated as an Essential Researcher and those functions have been completed and you no longer require this designation, let me know.

For now, you may continue to submit regular ROP and essential research plans for review.

Again, we do not anticipate a total ramp down of research, but the situation is fluid and we may need to change our guidance quickly. Accordingly, we ask that everyone exercise caution and ramp down your experiments to the extent possible, just in case all non-essential research needs to be halted. And, it is critically important that everyone reporting to campus *continue to complete the required symptom monitoring survey and participate in regular COVID-19 testing.*

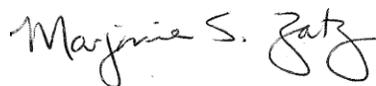
The operation of core facilities managed by ORED will continue unless general campus operations are curtailed. In the event that a particular core facility cannot accommodate your needs due to closure or the illness of the technical support staff, we will assist you in finding access to facilities at another campus if they remain open.

The Division of Animal Research Services (DARS, the vivarium) operates continuously, 365 days per year. DARS has a formal emergency management plan that directly addresses the topic of human disease outbreaks and pandemics. I encourage animal users to discuss this topic directly with the Campus Attending Veterinarian, Patrick Sharp, and/or the Director of DARS, Roy Hoglund.

The Natural Reserve System (NRS) facilities will remain open and available for use as long as general campus operations continue, however operation of the Yosemite and Sequoia Field Stations will be contingent upon the status of and access to Yosemite and Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks. Please consult with Faculty Director Jessica Blois on any questions related to your specific upcoming reserve use.

I remind you of the guidelines circulated last spring for laboratory preparations in the event of a campus research curtailment (see below). Again, **this is guidance in case we need to make changes quickly**, as we want everyone to be prepared well in advance. We will continue to update our researchers as changing public health conditions merit. Please feel free to contact me directly if you have any questions.

Warm regards,



Marjorie S. Zatz  
Interim Vice Chancellor for Research & Economic Development

## Laboratory preparations in case of more widespread issues that result in a campus curtailment:

If there are limited operations for an indefinite period of time, there may be a need to ramp down research activity in a way to preserve the integrity of data, make sure no harm is done to critical reagents and materials and equipment, and prepare for remote access to data. Accordingly, we recommend the following:

- **Ensure protocols for remote access to data.** IT services may be limited, so for those who will need to have remote access to campus servers and other resources, protocols should be tested ahead of time.
- **Prepare freezers and key equipment to be on emergency back-up power.** Please ensure that most essential equipment is on backup power. Work with building managers to ensure backup power is available for critical laboratory equipment. Consider remote sensing devices for critical laboratory equipment with alarms.
- **Have a plan for maintaining liquid nitrogen dewars and gas supplies.** Consider developing a building or departmental plan for topping off liquid nitrogen dewars and replacing/stocking backup gas tanks. We recommend that dewars remain topped off throughout the coming weeks in preparation for any potential disruption.
- **Identify procedures and processes that require regular personnel attention.** Establish a realistic plan for critical experiments and equipment that would be vulnerable to a long-term curtailment of operations and require daily or weekly interventions. Consider coordinating with colleagues who have similar research activities to identify ways to ensure mutual support and coverage of critical activities.
- **Designate one or two key personnel in a research group for maintaining critical experiments, equipment and processes that require regular personnel attention.** If campus access is limited, a designated individual may have access to campus. This access may be granted to perform critical tasks around long-term experiments, preservation of reagents and critical equipment, such as those identified above.
- **Groups using animal facilities should be in communication with animal care staff.** Although we anticipate animal facilities will maintain continual operations, laboratories should review existing protocols and coordinate with facility staff.
- **Environmental Health & Safety (EHS) and other emergency services will maintain operations, but plan now.** EH&S staff, like any of our campus community, could be affected by illness or other challenges as a result of operational/changes in communities, such as local schools closing. Communicate with EH&S personnel about any concerns about safety issues around lab curtailments.
- **Cross-train research staff to substitute for others who may be out sick or unable to come to work.** Ensure staff have the appropriate, up-to-date training to carry out work in areas that are outside the norm. **Document critical step-by-step instructions for laboratory procedures.** Encourage all researchers to be familiar with each other's work if an absence would threaten the loss of experiments (for example, which cells need transferring to new media.)
- **Review and test contingency plans and emergency procedures with researchers and staff.** Important considerations for lab work, as well as human and animal subjects research, should be included in contingency plans. Identify and consider your ability to work with limited

quantities (or completely without) common perishable items, such as dry ice, liquid nitrogen and various gas cylinders.

- **Prioritize.** Depending upon the nature of your research, prioritize work that can only be carried out in your research facility, and put off work amenable to remote support, such as data analysis. Stockpiling results and data now that could be analyzed remotely in the future is a potential option that might create future flexibility.
- **Research safety.** Safety is critical, and with the potential for unexpected absences, it is important that research activities be left in a safe state daily. Experiments should be left each day in a stable mode such that they do not present any biological, chemical or physical hazards in case of a prolonged absence. Further, experiments must incorporate “fail-safe” measures; that is, in the event that a member of the research team is not able to return to the lab the next day, or if there is a failure of air supply, cooling, power, water supply, vacuum or other connection, the experiment should not create hazardous conditions. Outside of active experiments, biological, chemical and radiological materials and equipment must be secured in a safe manner. Physically hazardous equipment (cryogenic, heated, pressurized, under vacuum, etc.) similarly must be maintained in a safe state. We recommend not initiating any long term, complex experiments at this time, and thinking about how you would ramp down currently ongoing experiments.