

Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry
Research Re-Entry Guidelines for Research Labs and Facilities on Western's Campus

1. Key Guiding Principles

1. Safety of students, faculty and staff and others remains the top priority at all times. This includes incorporating screening procedures and implementing newly accepted norms of hygiene, physical distancing and provision/use of PPE to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
2. Public Health Directives including local, provincial and federal government guidelines will be diligently followed in planning the timing and sequence of reopening labs and restarting research.
3. Institutional Directives: Deans, in coordination with Human Resources (HR) and Institutional Planning & Budgeting (IPB), will dictate the re-start schedule for Schulich Medicine & Dentistry research conducted in labs and facilities under the jurisdiction of Western. Research activities conducted within facilities under the jurisdiction of the hospitals will need to follow hospital and Lawson directives.
4. Equity: Identify, recognize and develop accommodation strategies for structural and other inequities (i.e. health vulnerabilities, family responsibilities, mental health concerns) unique to different groups and research settings. Maximize equitable treatment for all trainees, staff and faculty.
5. Monitoring: The University, School and Departments will establish procedures to ensure new safety measures are being followed, with the authority to restrict research activities in the event of non-compliance or COVID-19 resurgence. This will also include procedures for safe reporting of concerns, including mechanisms to protect individuals from reprisal.

2. General Considerations

- Research laboratories, investigator offices, student work areas and other research resources cannot open until their respective buildings are opened by the institution and deemed ready for occupancy.
- All faculty, research staff and trainees must complete a Health Assessment Questionnaire prior to returning to work. The questionnaire can be found within the PeopleSoft system online at <https://myhr.uwo.ca/>. The questionnaire appears as within "My Human Resources" titled "Return to Work Questionnaire". Additional screening procedures may be put in place as deemed appropriate.
- Research recovery has to occur in concert with recovery of other University activities and in adherence to public health and provincial guidelines for safety. Therefore, research recovery will occur as a gradual, phased scale-up of research activity in alignment with occupancy guidelines (see section 3 below for details).
- Be flexible: Conditions are expected to be variable, particularly in the early phases of return. Not all research team members may be able to return, want to return, or need to return. If not needed on campus, they should work remotely whenever possible.
- Personal Protection, hand hygiene, physical distancing: These actions remain the fundamental defence against transmission of COVID-19. Departmental and individual PI plans need to consider how physical distancing can be achieved (or not) in research areas including laboratories, offices, hallways, and common areas.
- Development of detailed plans: Each Department/Unit, individual laboratory, and core research facility within the School has unique research activities and considerations, so clear plans must be developed at the (1) individual PI; (2) core facility; and (3) Department/Unit levels (see Template planning tools to assist with this). These plans must be approved by the Department Chair and the Dean's Office. A broader Schulich Medicine & Dentistry plan for traffic flow, tracking of occupancy, and other School-wide considerations is also under development.
 - a. All plans need to be built first and foremost on the Key Guiding Principles outlined above, in addition to including group-specific research plans and priorities. These plans must be flexible and made with

a mindset of preparedness. Retain options for returning to an essential services model and remote work if and/or when rates of COVID-19 in the community increase beyond acceptable levels.

b. Plans must address the overarching challenges to restarting research including: (1) increasing staffing while introducing new routines to maintain physical distancing; (2) increasing levels of hygiene (hand, surfaces and equipment) in the research environment; and (3) maintaining access to critical supplies (including PPE) when supply lines may already be stretched.

- Existing moratoriums on in-person seminars, meetings, thesis exams, conferences and international travel will remain in place until specifically lifted.
- Visitors, including researchers from outside Western, service personnel, delivery personnel and vendor representatives must follow existing COVID-19 restrictions for booking appointments.

3. Phased Research Recovery

A phased approach to research re-start will progress based on Western's and the School's capacity to sustain the safety and security of students, staff and faculty. This phased approach enables researchers to ramp-up projects in order of priority, and importantly, adjust their workflows and work areas to either maintain the standard of 2 meters/6 feet distance between colleagues, or failing that, the wearing of appropriate PPE.

**** Remember that all phases are reversible should external or internal circumstances change.**

Phase 1: Preparation and Planning (estimated timeframe ~2 weeks)

- Re-open buildings in a phased manner using capacity to protect and clean as major determinants of order. This will be determined by the Dean in coordination with HR, IPB and Facilities Management as part of Western's global re-entry plan.
- Develop specific research re-start plans at the level of Schulich Medicine & Dentistry, Departments and individual PIs/core facility managers using the Key Guiding Principles and Template planning tools. Plans must be approved by the Department Chair and the Dean's Office.
- Determine which research supplies will be critical in the next 2-3 months. Order and purchase through normal procurement services but anticipate supply chain delays and the possibility of a rebound and reversal in the phased re-entry model.
- Start-up/calibrate equipment that has been shut down.
- Begin to re-establish animal colonies in accordance with ACVS restrictions.
- Human/clinical studies that were suspended due to the pandemic should be assessed for viability to restart in accordance with REB, hospital, and/or community partner restrictions. Wherever possible, clinical trial and research study participants should be engaged remotely.
- Refresh or obtain online training through Western Occupational Health and Safety for safe use and donning/doffing of PPE (masks, gloves), physical distancing, hand hygiene, decontamination practices, and laboratory safety (all faculty, staff and trainees working in labs).
- Issues and accountability around PPE/related supplies and health screening will be clarified at the Western and/or School level in Phase 1.

Phase 2: Start to Ramp-up Research Activities (estimated timeframe – ~2-3 weeks)

- During this phase, research activity will be restricted to ~20% occupancy at any one time.
- Consider use of staggered working hours and shift-work models that will enable a greater number of trainees and studies to advance while still maintaining the occupancy guideline and ensuring lab safety.
- Continue to work from home whenever possible and when not directly working in the laboratory.
- Research activities should be carefully and equitably prioritized. Priority studies might include:

- New COVID research projects that need to ramp up as fast as possible;
- Projects with deadlines for publication, student progress or student graduation;
- Large longitudinal studies where significant cost, loss of animals, and/or loss of irreplaceable data would be incurred;
- Grants or contracts that have specific time-sensitive milestones that need to be completed.
- Phase 2 return to research activities will be dependent on approvals of individual PI and Department/Unit plans by the Dean and Vice Dean, Research. Any uncertainties must engage discussions with the Western Research and/or Human Resources Occupational Health and Safety team.
- Ongoing monitoring of lab plans and staffing will be enabled. Chairs will identify Reporting Officers for their Department. Employees who learn they have contracted COVID-19 must report their health status to their respective Reporting Officer, who will in turn report this to the Associate Director, Human Resources.
- Dry lab/computational research activities should be carried out remotely whenever possible in order to facilitate and optimize research productivity and use of space in an environment of low physical occupancy restrictions.

Phase 3: Expand Research Activities (estimated timeframe – ~1-2 months)

- Research activity (personnel activity) will be restricted to ~40% occupancy at any given time.
- Consider use of staggered working hours and shift-work models that will enable a greater number of trainees and studies to advance while still maintaining the occupancy guideline and ensuring lab safety.
- Continue to work from home when possible and when not directly working in the laboratory.
- Scale up to Phase 3 research activities will be dependent on approvals of individual PI and Department/Unit plans by the Dean and Vice Dean, Research. Any uncertainties must engage discussions with the Western Research and/or Human Resources Occupational Health and Safety team.

Phase 4: Further Expansion of Research Activities- The “New Normal”

(timeframe – while COVID-19 remains a community health risk; expected to be at least 12-18 months)

- Increase activity to ~60% occupancy at any one time.
- Continue to work from home when possible and when not directly working in the laboratory.
- Scale up to Phase 4 research activities will be dependent on approvals of individual PI and Department/Unit plans by the Dean and Vice Dean, Research. Any uncertainties must engage discussions with the Western Research and/or Human Resources Occupational Health and Safety team.
- Engage in collaborative efforts where possible to ensure optimal use of laboratory space and to expand options for groups with many trainees who could not advance otherwise.

Schulich Medicine & Dentistry is committed to working closely with all stakeholders in our research community in order to develop creative and collaborative strategies that strive towards 100% research capacity (in terms of outputs) while still working within the 20% → 40% → 60% occupancy restrictions across the different recovery phases.

4. Additional Helpful Resources

The full list of COVID-19 information from [Public Health Agency of Canada \(PHAC\)](#)

PHAC Risk-Informed [Decision-Making Guidelines For Workplaces and Businesses](#)

Health Canada recommendations for [hard-surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers](#) (COVID-19)

Western Occupational Health and Safety [Learning Modules](#) *COVID-related modules expected to be available soon

Helpful blog post on [The Risks: Know Them - Avoid Them](#)

PHAC Information about [non-medical masks and face coverings](#)
Compiled Research Re-Entry Guidelines from [other institutions around the world](#)