



# VPR UPDATE

NEWS FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH

September 30, 2020

*This is the first installment of VPR Update, a monthly email produced by the [Office of the Vice President for Research](#) that aims to increase awareness around important research and scholarship items that affect our community. VPR Update is sent to all active investigators, including those engaged in human research, and research administrators across the three U-M campuses.*

Dear Colleagues,

As part of our ongoing efforts to catalyze, support and safeguard research and scholarship across the three U-M campuses, I am pleased to share with you the first installment of *VPR Update*. This monthly email, produced by the Office of the Vice President for Research, will feature important updates about research and scholarship so that our community can advance knowledge, solve challenging problems and enhance quality of life.

Given our researchers' tremendous compliance with COVID-19 policies and procedures, as well as our improved understanding around virus transmission, we soon will undergo a limited expansion that allows for increased research and scholarship activity. Recognizing that our research productivity is not yet back to 100 percent, this next phase will allow for increased laboratory density, an expansion of human research participants and increased access for undergraduate researchers, who play a critical role in our research mission. Research leadership will continuously monitor virus transmission rates over the next 4-6 weeks to ensure our research community can safely maintain this expansion. The health and safety of our research community will remain our top priority.

## **Expansion of laboratory density to 60 percent**

- Beginning October 5, research laboratories across our three U-M campuses may increase to 60 percent density if social distancing and at least 144 square feet per person can be maintained on any given shift. The decision to pilot an increase from 45 percent density is based on feedback from our research community, remains consistent with our benchmarking across peer institutions and acknowledges the ongoing commitment of our researchers to establish a culture of safety in regard to COVID-19. This includes tremendous compliance with face coverings and social distancing. To date, based on contact tracing of asymptomatic individuals in laboratories where a researcher has tested positive for COVID-19, there is no sign of virus transmission in our research spaces.
- Our shared commitment to public health practices has allowed us to increase laboratory density, but with this limited expansion, we must remain vigilant, practice social distancing, maintain workspaces with at least 144 square feet per person, and wear face coverings in order to reduce COVID-19 transmission. Note all work that can occur remotely should continue to be done in that

manner, including office and dry laboratory work. Please consult directly with your research associate deans if you have any further questions about laboratory density requirements.

### Expansion of human research activation

- In-person human research studies that have been approved for activation under Tier 0, Tier 1 and Tier 2 may continue to proceed safely. Research leadership recently reclassified its risk factors for human research that, beginning October 5, may allow for some studies previously categorized as Tier 3 to safely resume with the necessary approvals.
  - Engaging with human research participants ages 65 and older will no longer result in a Tier 3 categorization.
    - Although advanced age is a known risk factor for severe COVID-19, our experience over the past four months has indicated that, with appropriate protections in place (including masks and face shields), the risk of transmission is very low. Note that researchers who engage with human research participants ages 65 and older are required to wear a face shield.
  - Ten or more contacts per day will no longer result in a Tier 3 categorization.
- If your team delayed its submission based solely on age or number of contacts per day, we encourage you to submit your [Human Research Activation Checklist](#).
- Study teams that have resumed activity with approval from the committee, but were not involving participants ages 65 and older, may now include this population (if it is within the scope of their IRB approval) without resubmission to the activation committee. Please note that study teams also must wear a face shield when working with participants ages 65 and older.
- Studies that involve the following will remain Tier 3 and are not yet eligible for activation:
  - Studies involving immunocompromised individuals
  - Studies involving individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 within 14 days or have recorded new symptoms using the [ResponsiBLUE screening check](#)
- Please refer to the [U-M research re-engagement webpage](#) for more information about human research activity, including FAQs, guiding principles and activation procedures. If you have any further questions, please contact [human-research-activation@umich.edu](mailto:human-research-activation@umich.edu).

### Expansion of in-person undergraduate research activity

- Beginning October 12, all undergraduate students will be eligible to participate in in-person research and scholarship. This will expand the current undergraduate research policy, which is limited to only seniors with prior research experience. All dry laboratory research, mentorship and training activities that can be done remotely must continue in that manner.
- Any training or onboarding to a laboratory or research space that requires less than 6 feet of distance will continue to require additional approvals and PPE. [Learn more](#) about the U-M training exception guidance.
- Please note that undergraduate students:
  - Are subject to the same building capacity limits as other researchers
  - Must participate in the same symptom monitoring as other researchers
  - Must complete the return-to-research training module
  - May not be compelled by principal investigators to resume research and scholarship

### COVID-19 research metrics

- Researchers to date who have displayed symptoms and tested **positive** for COVID-19 (May 21 - September 29): 9 (8 Ann Arbor, 1 Dearborn)

- Zero researchers tested positive for COVID-19 within the past seven days. Environment, Health and Safety is managing contact tracing when needed to protect the health and safety of our research community, and at this time, there is no indication of any virus transmission between laboratory or research coworkers (which includes testing of asymptomatic coworkers).
- Researchers to date who have displayed symptoms (or were tested as part of contact tracing of asymptomatic individuals in the lab) and tested **negative** for COVID-19 (May 21 - September 29):  
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#### **Inequities induced by COVID-19 across research**

- Recognizing the pandemic has not impacted all individuals or researchers equally, the Office of the Vice President for Research has organized a committee to address inequities induced or exacerbated by COVID-19 across the research community. Led by Professors Tabbye Chavous and Huda Akil, the committee will partner with colleagues from across the three U-M campuses to reduce these negative impacts on researchers' scholarly progress, productivity and opportunity to thrive, and help support an equitable, diverse and robust research environment. More information about this important committee will be shared with the university community in the coming weeks.

#### **Executive order on combating race and sex stereotyping**

- President Mark Schlissel and Provost Susan Collins issued a [statement](#) on September 26 regarding a recent [executive order](#) issued by the White House. I support their statement, and the Office of the Vice President for Research remains committed to academic freedom, equality in our research community, and the roles of research and scholarship in addressing important issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion.

#### **Expanded training course required for all researchers**

- Employees and students engaged in research and scholarship across the three U-M campuses are required to complete an expanded training course that outlines important guidance about responsible conduct in research and scholarship. The updated Responsible Conduct of Research and Scholarship training course, which is designed to meet expanded federal requirements, is available through My LINC and must be completed by June 30, 2021. [Learn more](#) about RCRS training, and if you have any further questions, please contact [UMOR.RCRS@umich.edu](mailto:UMOR.RCRS@umich.edu).

Stay safe and healthy, and research onward.

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Vice President for Research

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