**Tip Sheet #3: Is my research subject to ethics review?**

All research involving human participants requires review and approval by York’s University’s Research Ethics Board (the Human Participants Review Committee) prior to beginning the research.

For research to be subject to review it must be considered “research” and it must involve “human participants.” (See below questions and answers.) However, making the determination as to whether an activity is research that is subject to ethics review is not always clear.

**What is research?**

“Research” is defined as an undertaking intended to extend knowledge through a disciplined inquiry or systematic investigation.[[TCPS, Article 2.1]](http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/chapter2-chapitre2/).

**What is a human participant?**

A human participant is defined as “a living individual about whom an investigator  
conducting research obtains data, either through intervention or interaction with the individual or through identifiable private information.”

Research involving human remains, cadavers, tissues, biological fluids, embryos or foetuses are also subject to review by the Research Ethics Board. [[TCPS, Article 2.1]](http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/english/policystatement/section1.cfm)

**What types of activities require an ethics review?**

*Researchers should ask the following questions to help determine what kind of activities require an ethics review.*

* Does your project involve collecting input and/or information from people – for example, responses, reactions, measurements, opinions or experiences – or input collected by someone else, including in person, online, in writing, over the telephone or by any other means?
  + For example: Does your research involve interviews? Focus groups? Surveys? In person, online, on the phone, via skype?
* Does your project involve the use of human biological materials? Did the sample you are using come from a human body?
* Does your project involve using data about people previously collected by someone else (e.g., student or commercial records)?
* Does your project involve the collection or use of health information?
* Does your project involve animals?
* Are you collaborating with someone who is doing any of the above?

If you answered ‘yes’ to any of the above questions, then your research is subject to ethics review and approval. If you feel your research is NOT subject to ethics review, please contact ORE ([ore@yorku.ca](mailto:ore@yorku.ca)) or (ext. 55914) for further assistance.

**Why does personal health information need to be protected?**

From the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), “Better Information for Improved Health: A Vision for Health System Use of Data in Canada” (June 2013):

We must remember that personal health information is not just data. It is sensitive information provided confidentially by individual Canadians to clinicians in the context of care and, as such, needs to be protected.

Health information privacy laws govern the collection, use, management and disclosure of personal health information. These laws generally permit secondary use of health data, whether paper or electronic, for management and planning of the health system. In most instances, this use is—and will continue to be—based on data that has been de-identified to respect the privacy and confidentiality of patients.

**My research is subject to an ethics review, but does it need review via York University’s Research Ethics Boards (REBs)?**

There may be occasions where it is unclear as to whether or not an ethics review is required via one of York’s REBs. For example, if you are conducting research off site or in collaboration with another institution where ethics approval is already in place at the other institution. In this case, an ethics review is **still** required via York’s REBs.

*Researchers should ask the following questions to help determine whether* your research must be reviewed by the relevant York REB:

• Is your work conducted by University faculty, staff or students?   
• Is your research performed on the premises of the University?    
• Is your work performed with or involving the use of facilities or equipment belonging to the University?   
• Does your research involve University students, staff or faculty?  
• Does your work satisfy a requirement imposed by the University for a degree program or for completion of course of study?  
• Is your research conducted by or under the direction of any employee or agent of the University in connection with his or her institutional responsibilities?

If you answered ‘yes’ to any of the above questions, then your research is subject to ethics review and approval via York’s REB.

If you feel your research is NOT subject to ethics review, please contact ORE ([ore@yorku.ca](mailto:ore@yorku.ca)) or (ext. 55914) for further assistance.

**Don’t forget! The final determination as to whether or not an ethics review is required for a study rests with the Research Ethics Board, the Human Participants Review Committee (HPRC.)**

**If you have any questions, please contact ORE:** [**ore@yorku.ca**](mailto:ore@yorku.ca) **or 416-736-5914.**