FAQs re Research Ethics Submissions - Research Involving Human Participants

Is the Office of Research Ethics and Research Ethics Board (HPRC) operational?

The Office of Research Ethics and the Research Ethics Board (HPRC) are fully operational, although working remotely. Ethics reviews are conducted virtually. Should a meeting be required to discuss an urgent matter, meetings will be held remotely via Zoom. All ORE email addresses continue to be monitored with the same frequency. However, while ORE staff will do its best to respond to all inquiries as quickly as possible, responses to inquiries and applications may be delayed somewhat.

Contacts:

For general questions: Denise Jagdeosingh-Martinez ore@yorku.ca

For substantive questions: Alison Collins-Mrakas acollins@yorku.ca

Both email addresses will continue to be frequently monitored throughout each work day. As the university is open, phones continue to be monitored as per usual.

What has changed?

- Phones: As the office is now remote, phones will no longer be answered. To reach ORE staff, please use the contact emails noted above.
- Submit any paper-based items via email instead of campus mail or in-person drop-off. Send paper-based submissions to: ore@yorku.ca.
- Highest priority will be given to research that is time sensitive (such as COVID-19).
- Presentations – as all in-class instruction has been moved online, scheduled presentations will be postponed until further notice.
- Meeting requests: Please contact Alison Collins-Mrakas, Sr. Policy Advisor, ORE at: acollins@yorku.ca. Note if preferred or required, meetings may be conducted via zoom or telephone.

How do I submit my ethics protocol?

For Faculty:
Faculty members are encouraged to use the ORE online ethics review system for the submission of new protocols. The online system will continue to be monitored, and protocols processed as per usual – albeit with a moderately slower response time.

The online system may be accessed here: https://research.info.yorku.ca/ore/human-participants/.

Effective immediately, any paper-based application (for new protocols, renewals to and/or amendments to existing protocols) must be sent as electronic documents to ore@yorku.ca OR acollins@yorku.ca. Approvals will be issued and returned via email.

For Graduate students (Thesis- and dissertation-related research ONLY)
Students are advised to follow the direction of the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) regarding the submission of research proposals and ethics protocol documents (where applicable). Information can be found at: https://gradstudies.yorku.ca/covid-19-update-grads/.

Student protocols will be processed as per usual process once received in ORE.

Do NOT email your TD1, TD2 or TD4 directly to ORE. It must be processed by FGS first. Please contact gsthesis@yorku.ca for any questions.
For All other Student Research (course related, MRPs, etc.)
Please contact your program office for submission procedures regarding research related to MRPs, Individualized research (such as undergraduate theses).
STUDENTS ARE REMINDED THAT UNSUPERVISED RESEARCH MAY NOT BE CONDUCTED AND WILL NOT BE REVIEWED BY ANY ETHICS COMMITTEE.

What changes to a current or ongoing study require an amendment application and approval?

Amendment applications are NOT REQUIRED if you are halting, rescheduling or delaying research activities UNLESS those actions are at the request of the funding agency, study sponsor or other body. Researchers are required to document when studies have been halted.

Amendment applications are REQUIRED and HPRC approval must be obtained before you change study procedures (including consenting processes) for new or existing participants.
Example: You want to administer new and follow-up study questionnaires over the phone instead of in-person, or you want to change the location of in-person interviews instead of having participants come into the lab at the University.

There are some limited exceptions to the requirement for an Amendment: For all approved applications that do not specify whether a procedure is remote versus in-person, you do not need to submit an amendment.

The amendment application form is available on the ORE website at: https://research.info.yorku.ca/ore/human-participants/.

Please contact Alison Collins-Mrakas at acollins@yorku.ca if you have any questions.

Temporary halt to participant recruitment… what do I do?

This does not need to be reported to the Office of Research Ethics unless the study hold is initiated at the request of an external funding agency if applicable or relevant.

When participants cannot come to study locations, what should I do?

Some study participants may not be able to come to campus labs, offices, clinics or other study locations because of infection, self-isolation, travel restrictions, facilities restrictions or being in a COVID-19 high-risk group. Study teams should plan for this possibility and submit an amendment application for any alternatives. These might include (but are not limited to):
- Phone calls;
- Use of digital technology to interact with participants for the purposes of recording data (e.g., cell phone photos, zoom, etc); and
- Alternate study locations.

Can I still interact with my research subjects?

Out of an abundance of caution, researchers should have a compelling reason why in-person interactions with participants need to occur or continue. One example might be studies where there are literally no options other than in-person interactions.

As of March 15, for situations where there are no alternatives to in-person interactions, researchers are advised to incorporate social distancing of at least two metres apart during all interactions.
How should I plan for this rapidly evolving situation?

As of today, the University is open and research activities are continuing. However, given the rapidly changing situation, all researchers that have ongoing research should develop a COVID-19 mitigation plan. At a minimum, researchers should consider alternatives to direct interaction with human participants, postponing the commencement of any new research activities or scaling back existing research activities that involve direct interaction with human participants.