

Memo

To: York University Faculty
From: Amir Asif, Vice-President Research & Innovation
Date: June 10, 2020
Subject: **Research Ethics during COVID 19:
Current or Proposed Research involving Human Participants**

If you are a researcher (student or faculty member) and have an approved research ethics protocol or are submitting a new protocol, you will need to consider the following:

1. Does your approved protocol or proposed project involve face to face contact or direct interaction with people?

While research with human participants can continue, however, due to the current COVID-19 outbreak and the possible risk of exposure for in-person contact associated with research activities, researchers should have a compelling reason why in-person interactions with participants need to occur or continue.

For studies where there are no options to in-person interactions, researchers are advised that they must follow current public health guidelines including, but not limited to, appropriate physical distancing of at least 2 metres and nose and mouth coverings, and, where necessary, full PPE during all interactions.

My research involves in person interaction with human participants, what should I do?

- a. Researchers can delay their research until such time that the physical distancing requirements have been lifted.
OR
- b. Researchers can modify their research activities to use alternatives to in person contact. Researchers can use skype, zoom, phone for example to conduct their research wherever possible.

When and how do I amend my protocol if it involves in-person interaction with human participants?

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 ethics approval must be obtained if you change any study procedures or consent processes.

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.



Steps to amend your protocol:

1. Complete the amendment application form and clearly outline what has changed

Example: My approved protocol included in person interviews and I will now be conducting my interviews by zoom.

a. Faculty amendment application:

<https://research.info.yorku.ca/ore/human-participants/>.

b. Graduate student amendment application:

<http://gradstudies.yorku.ca/files/2018/02/amendment-request-form-thesis.docx?x93179>

2. Attach any revised documents: At a minimum your consent form will likely have to be changed as you will not be obtaining consent in person.

- a. For example, if your approved research included a written consent form, requiring in-person signatures and you are now obtaining consent verbally (ie while interviewing via Zoom) you will need to provide a “verbal” consent document that you will read out to the participant(s) on your zoom call. The Verbal consent document can be the same consent form that you already have; you will just need to confirm that you will:
 - i. Read it to the participants
 - ii. Obtain their verbal acknowledgement and consent

3. Other considerations when submitting an amendment application:

a. What about data storage?

If your originally approved protocol stated that you would be storing your data on campus (i.e. in a locked cabinet in a campus office) or some other location that you cannot access at present, you will need to state where the data will now be securely stored.

For example, the data will now be stored in a locked cabinet in your home; or on a password protected personal computer in your residence.

b. What conferencing platforms should I use?

It is recommended that any platforms used for remote research activities be supported by York University. At present, Zoom is supported. If you wish to use another platform (such as Jitsi) please consult with UIT for information on privacy and security.

NOTE: If your approved protocol application did not specify whether a procedure is remote versus in-person, **you do not need to submit an amendment** as the use of remote options is already approved.

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

2. Does /will your research involve the collection of or interaction with human samples? (Including swabs, breath samples, or saliva)?

Given the significant risk of exposure to COVID-19, any research activity that involves the collection of or interaction with human samples is **suspended until further notice**.