

# Frequently Asked Questions

From the March 17 COVID-19 Research Virtual Town Hall.

Updated March 22.

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## Human Resources:

Q: Who is allowed on campus? **Updated**

A: The campus is currently open and access to facilities will be maintained for personnel who provide essential services, including essential research activities and for faculty who have received an exemption from their Dean allowing access for preparation and delivery of virtual instruction. If you are providing essential services or have an exemption for instruction, please contact your building coordinator for specific access questions.

If the campus were to be closed, the campus community would be notified immediately through CornellALERT messages and at <https://emergency.cornell.edu> .

Q: Has there been any decision as to when normal operations will resume or if the campus will be completely closed? **Updated**

A: President Pollack has announced that Commencement will be delayed, with more details to be shared at a later date. Summer session has not been altered, but this is a rapidly evolving situation. It is best to continue checking the [Cornell Novel Coronavirus Resources and Updates](#) page for new announcements. This page has a link to the [Coronavirus Research Continuity Guidance](#) which contains this FAQ and other information for researchers.

Q: Must everyone work remotely? **Updated**

A: Everyone other than those providing essential services, essential research activities, or have received an exemption from their Dean allowing access for preparation and delivery of virtual instruction, must work remotely. However, it is not possible for all

staff to work remotely. All remote work questions should be directed to the [Human Resources Business Continuity](#) website.

For those working from home, it may be useful to note that some local internet providers are offering cost savings on their services to help support their customers. Check your providers website for further information.

Q: Are there guidelines for student travel?

A: All travel related questions should be directed to the university FAQ site: <https://www.cornell.edu/coronavirus/faq.cfm#travel-restrictions>

Q: Are there export control considerations applicable to individuals working or studying abroad?

A: Keep in mind that export control laws restrict the release (whether done electronically, via shipping or hand carry) of items and information regulated for reasons of national security, foreign policy, anti-terrorism or non-proliferation. Controlled items include (but are not limited to) certain chemicals, reagents, viruses, bacteria, high level encryption tools, process design kits and proprietary technical information. More information can be found on Cornell's [Export Control](#) page. Please consult with Cornell's Export Control Officer prior to leaving the country with, or sending out of the country, any item to which controls may apply. In addition, the access of controlled technical information from a foreign location, whether by a U.S. citizen or a foreign national, is considered an export. No controlled technical information may be accessed from abroad, or transported on a device taken abroad, without first receiving clearance from the Export Control Officer.

Moreover, U.S. sanctions impose comprehensive prohibitions against certain countries, and therefore any work or study done in any of the following countries, must first be reviewed and explicitly approved in writing by the Export Control Officer: Iran, Syria, North Korea, Cuba and the Crimea Region of the Ukraine. Please note that, in most cases, a specific or general license from the U.S. government will be required.

## Essential Research Activities

Q: Who can be considered essential research staff? **Updated**

A: During the research pause, research activities that can be conducted remotely will continue. Only essential research activities will be conducted on campus. Staff, graduate students, faculty, and other researchers conducting essential research activities are essential research staff. Deans and the Vice Provost for Research decide what research activities are essential. For guidance on what activities may be considered essential see [Further Guidance on Essential Research](#). For activities related to animal care, see the [CARE COVID-19 Resource Page](#) and [CARE Pandemic Response Plan](#).

- Q: If my research is deemed essential, how many should be allowed to return to lab?  
A: The minimum number required to conduct the essential activity safely. Stagger schedules to minimize the number of people present at one time and follow social distancing guidelines.
- Q: For growing season-related crop research, should we continue to prepare?  
A: Yes.
- Q: Are plants and plant care continuity defined similarly to animal continuity?  
A: Yes.
- Q: Can externally funded laboratory work continue if social contact is avoided?  
A: Yes, within the limitations established for essential research activities.
- Q: May we still order animals and temp-sensitive reagents?  
A: No new animal orders may be placed (with exceptions for COVID-19/SARS-CoV-2 research), and it would be wise to limit all other sensitive orders in case further restrictions or illness prevent delivery of materials.
- Q: I understand there is an exemption to the pause for research related to COVID-19. How do I determine if my research fits this exemption?  
A: For research efforts relating to COVID-19, please see the [Rapid Research Response Website](#). . As a first step, researchers are encouraged to connect with one of six expert faculty members who can advise on the proposed research and who can, if deemed appropriate, collaborate with the investigator to achieve the stated goals of the project. Before commencing the research project, approval must be sought from an ad hoc research approval committee (chaired by Paula Cohen [paula.cohen@cornell.edu](mailto:paula.cohen@cornell.edu)) through the submission of a brief written request as detailed on the [SARS-CoV-2 Research Approval Process](#) webpage. Following the committee's recommendation, approval of this research will also require the consent of the Chair of the home department in which the research personnel reside.
- Q: What are the guidelines for the continuation of animal study over next several weeks?  
A: Further restrictions may occur, but as of March 22nd, care for animals including continuing treatments, research manipulations, or special feeding that is necessary to maintain critical animal models, which can be carried out with minimal contact with other researchers and appropriate precautions for biosafety, may continue. Preparing new animals for ongoing or new experiments must stop now. Procedures on existing animals that may cause complications or involve extensive follow-up such as surgery should be avoided. This is important to ensure that animals are treated humanely since it is possible that personnel may be unable to properly care for animals due to illness or further restrictions.

Q: If the objective of the research pause is to limit social contact, couldn't this be accomplished through a rotation mechanism?

A: The goal is to prevent personnel from coming into contact with the virus. People who are infected may be asymptomatic for several days and shed the virus into the environment. CDC has identified that person-to-person spread may occur through inhalation of infectious droplets produced when a person coughs or sneezes. Additionally, the virus may be deposited onto common surfaces where another person may contact it and self-infect. Virus lifetime on hard surfaces is currently thought to be limited to approximately 4 days and on porous surfaces up to 24 hours. Facilities Services has increased the frequency that common touch surfaces are sanitized; it is important for employees who are onsite to clean common work areas (lab benches, etc.) with an appropriate sanitizer.

### IT/Communications:

Q: Will IT experts be available to help with computation equipment?

A: Keeping research computers running and ensuring online instruction and meetings go smoothly are considered essential services. Support services will continue as usual.

### Facilities:

Q: Can parking restrictions be reduced now that there are fewer people on campus?

A: In order to relieve some of the burden and stress on Cornell community members who must be on campus during this public health emergency, Cornell Transportation will not enforce regular parking permit restrictions, with the exception of a few areas, March 17 through Friday, April 10, 2020. People may park in most permit-restricted or Park mobile spaces during this period, with no permit or payment required. Cornell Transportation will continue to enforce fire lanes, loading zones, no parking areas, accessible spaces, and reserved spaces, including the client spaces at the Veterinary College. Cornell Transportation will continue to monitor the availability of parking and will make a final determination as to the resumption of regular enforcement by April 10. Please visit [parking.cornell.edu](http://parking.cornell.edu) for updates and announcements. If you have any questions, please contact Cornell Transportation at 607-255-4600 or [transportation@cornell.edu](mailto:transportation@cornell.edu).

Q: My lab is in ramp-down mode and I want to shut down my hood to save energy, but I need the chemicals that are stored when I return.

A: In order to hibernate a fume hood, you may store small amounts of corrosives in the ventilated cabinet under the hood. The fume hood removes vapor released from these chemicals. Cabinets that are full are more likely to have these vapors and are more likely to have incompatible materials and other hazards associated with this storage.

Please use your professional judgement to decide what an appropriate amount of chemicals to store is. Consider under what conditions would a reaction happen resulting in vapors that need to be removed with ventilation. Further guidance may be found in the [Fume Hood Hibernation Protocol for COVID-19](#) on the [Coronavirus Research Continuity Guidance](#) webpage.

Q: Will the buildings and labs continue to have daily cleaning after March 18, or will the shutdown suspend the regular cleaning activities? **Updated**

A: Occupied buildings will continue to be cleaned. New York state recognizes that universities must maintain safe and clean spaces, critical research environments.

The virus is a lipid enveloped virus and fairly easy to kill with standard disinfectants. The untreated lifetime right now is projected to be 4 days on hard surfaces and 24 hours or less on dry, porous surfaces. For further information see: "Is Cornell using enhanced cleaning practices?" on <https://www.cornell.edu/coronavirus/faq.cfm>

Q: Will card access to buildings and the animal facility be maintained for essential laboratory personnel?

A: Yes.

Q: Some buildings and labs are usually always open. Will those now be locked, and how do we know who has keycard access?

A: Please check with your building facilities management to see how building security is being handled at each location.

Q: Will the libraries continue to provide access to journals and other resources that are needed to work remotely?

A: Yes, but with some limitations for hard copy. For further information see: <https://www.library.cornell.edu/covid-19>

Q: Are ongoing capital projects like lab renovations continuing or suspended? **Updated**

A: Capital projects and zone maintenance projects that are considered essential are continuing at this time.

Q: How will facilities managers be notified of the Dean's decisions of what research may continue and what staff might require access?

A: This process varies in each college. However, each facility manager should check with their local department administrators to confirm this information.

Q: Will technicians and service engineers from companies be allowed on campus to repair broken major equipment?

A: Yes, but only for equipment to support approved essential functions and preservation of research (e.g. -80 freezers, animal cage washers, autoclaves, etc.)

Q: Do offices receive recirculated air, or is it conditioned exterior air?

A: This condition varies in every facility. Please check with your local unit facilities team to confirm how your building's HVAC system is configured.

Q: What EHS and building services will be continued for the start-up business incubators-- and at what frequency?

A: Business incubator clients should check with their local building facilities team to confirm what services are continuing.

Q: What support services can the University provide while we are not in our labs on a regular basis. For example, will someone from building maintenance be checking labs for water leaks, unusual smells, freezer alarms, etc.?

A: This service will vary somewhat in every facility, but most unit facilities teams are providing some level of routine building walk-throughs to check all areas, focusing on labs and mechanical rooms. Please check with your local unit facilities team to confirm the specifics.

### Academics & Students:

Q: Will tenure/promotion clocks be set back a semester, or some other accommodation made, if research is disrupted for a significant period of time?

A: This is under discussion, but no decision has been made.

Q: How do we help graduating PhD students who are scheduled to graduate in May but now have had their experiments cancelled?

A: This is under discussion, but no decision has been made.

Q: How will the B exam process work per the requirement of "public" disclosure, public defense?

A: During these extraordinary times, it is acceptable to conduct B exams remotely. IT can help set up Zoom meetings that can be advertised to the public.

Q: Are graduate students who are involved in research on coronavirus that has been deemed essential allowed to continue on that work?

A: Yes, that is currently the plan.

### Sponsored Awards & Finance:

Q: Are there any restrictions on the use of funds for salary (GRAs, postdocs, summer salary, etc.) as researchers conduct their work exclusively from home?

A: Grant funds may be used to support GRAs, postdocs and other project personnel working remotely, or for leave consistent with the university's policies and practices. Typically, rebudgeting authority exists, as long as it is within the project's scope. Major federal agencies are emphasizing flexibility, and consistency with institutional practice. Contact [sfs-help@cornell.edu](mailto:sfs-help@cornell.edu) if you have a specific allowability scenario. We hope to

know more about summer appointments in the coming weeks. See also <https://hr.cornell.edu/covid-19-pay-practices>

Q: Can you provide clarity about hourly technicians supported on grants and if they cannot do the work from home, do we continue to pay them anyway?

A: We encourage finding alternative work that can be done remotely. Such work could include, documenting laboratory procedures, developing laboratory management protocols or, for more advanced personnel, performing literature reviews, developing data management plans or examining methods of rigor and reproducibility. Some federal agencies have approved the use of funds even where work cannot be performed, as long as it is consistently treated across funding sources. OSP and SFS, along with HR are reviewing the implication of recently issued federal guidance. See <https://hr.cornell.edu/covid-19-pay-practices> and <https://researchservices.cornell.edu/news/coronavirus-updates-federal-agencies>.

Q: How to handle contractual obligations when lab cannot be accessed and the grant does not allow expenditure beyond the end date?

A: If your research is slowed down or halted due to the COVID-19 crisis and you are approaching the end date of your grant or contract, please contact your Grant and Contract Officer ([Who is my GCO?](#)) to explore the possibility of requesting a no-cost extension. If you are working on a cooperative agreement or a contract, it may be important for you to reach out to your Program Officer to discuss a revised scope of work or revisions to the deliverable dates. Federal, State and other agencies are taking a flexible approach to deliverables and report due dates.

Q: My DARPA program manager asked my grants officer at Cornell office of research to contact DARPA with a revised statement of work and deadlines. Will the Cornell grants officer(s) be available to work on the required revisions and interface with DARPA?

A: Yes, the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) has transitioned to a remote work environment. OSP staff members will continue to support faculty and staff in their research administration needs during this time. We do not anticipate any changes in our level of support. The OSP office hours remain 8:30 to 5:00. The easiest way to reach us is via email, however most staff members have their office phones forwarded to their cell phones. Everyone is checking their voice mail on a regular basis.

Q: Can study changes be fast-tracked by the IRB? or prioritized for low-risk studies? Many changes will probably decrease risk to human subjects; e.g., moving from in-person data collection to telephone or Zoom. Can requests for changes be done quickly?

A: Yes, the IRB has a process in place for fast-tracking modifications to protocols (e.g., moving from in-person interviews to Zoom/phone interviews), and swiftly reviewing new low-risk studies related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Please contact the IRB at <mailto:irbhp@cornell.edu>.

Q: Will I be able to submit a grant proposal next week?

A: Yes. OSP Grant and Contract Officers (GCOs) are reviewing and submitting your grant proposals from their remote workspaces. Please be aware that due to the extent of remote work occurring across the country, some sponsor systems are experiencing slowdowns or other issues that may impact proposal submissions. While many sponsors have mechanisms for addressing such issues up to an including a missed proposal deadline, all applicants should take proactive action and submit proposals well before the published deadline. This will allow for necessary troubleshooting and documenting of issues if/when they occur. In addition, some agencies are publishing extensions to deadlines. Please reach out to your assigned Grant & Contract Officer with any questions or concerns. See [Who is my GCO?](#) for current assignments.

### Purchasing:

Q: Will the purchasing department be open during the laboratory shut down if we need critical supplies or repair parts?

A: Staff in Business Service Centers, Procurement Services and Sponsored Financial Services are working remotely, and are available to process orders.

Q: If we need materials can we have them delivered to a home address? **Updated**

A: Please see <https://www.dfa.cornell.edu/main-dfa/news/covid-19-response-procuring-research-supplies-during-laboratory-shutdown>

Q: How will mail and package delivery be handled during the research pause?

A: New York State recognizes that universities must maintain core campus utilities. Please check with your local unit facilities team to see how mail and shipping/receiving is being handled within your building.