

To: All VCHRI Investigators

June 2, 2020

Resumption of Research –Stage 1

In response to the ongoing COVID-19 situation, VCH Research Institute (VCHRI) will commence a gradual, phased resumption of research at VCH by following the guidelines set out by the BC Public Health Officer and the principles, prioritization and contextual information set out by UBC. The approach, however, will also be aligned with VCHRI and VCH requirements.

All activities that can be performed remotely must continue to do so. Those who cannot work remotely must comply with the following:

Occupancy

In accordance with the above we are planning a gradual re-entry plan with a maximum building occupancy limit of 30% capacity for each research building. We recognize this will be difficult to achieve as very few groups occupy an entire building and most have other functions such as VCH clinics included within. A recent VCH town hall meeting indicated that VCH is aiming for an initial 10% increase for face-to face patient visits to ambulatory buildings (such as DHCC), which is significantly lower than our plan, but operates differently than wet/dry lab areas. Staff should continue working remotely; where this is not possible a plan must be submitted.

Considerations for Occupancy: A physical distance of at least 2 metres must be maintained at all times during any activities. There are many ways to calculate the maximum number of people for a given space in order to meet this objective:

- For example - a general guideline is 12 m² /person and number of available lab benches/work stations. While a space's footprint/square footage may determine the maximum number of people, areas that have a lot of equipment, benches, machinery or obstructions may accommodate fewer people in order to adhere to physical distancing requirements.

Overall building occupancy will be determined using combined information provided on the excel spreadsheet(s) that will include prioritization and justification of activities, and take into account the use and scheduling of shared facilities, medical animal facilities, availability of PPE, shipping and receiving requirements, etc. Centre Directors will review the plans and spreadsheets to make a determination as to which projects can proceed. (See Approval Process for details.)

Clinical spaces must follow VCH policies and guidelines for space occupancy, policies and safety measures. Details are currently being investigated (see "Human Subject Research) so current resumption plans will be reviewed for research only and will address those located in

JBRC, Robert H. N. Ho Research Centre, Research Pavilion, ICORD (floors 3, 4 and 5 and vivarium), the 3rd floor of the Eye Care Centre and the Centre for Brain Health, floors 3, 4 and 5.

Buildings such as Gordon and Leslie Diamond Health Care Centre, Skin Care Centre, all but the 3rd floor of the Eye Care Centre will be reviewed separately in accordance with clinical/health authority policies and processes are still being determined.

Engineering and Administrative Controls

VCH Infection Control does not approve of the installation of plexiglass. Tarps are not also approved and we cannot enter into space modifications for these initial phases. With the above constraints, and where remote work is not possible, physical distancing concerns should be addressed using staff scheduling, marking areas with tape or signage to delineate physical distancing, adjusting furniture placement (such as a file cabinet in front of your desk area to increase your barrier) or relocating staff or services to an alternate area.

Washrooms are limited to one person at a time even those with two stalls.

Staff must stay on the right side at all times when using hallways and stairwells.

Elevator occupancy is being changed to accommodate physical distancing. Signage will be posted.

You may wish to implement floor monitors to ensure occupancy and safety measures are being followed.

Meetings should be conducted remotely and meetings rooms only used for single-use confidential calls or where 2 metre physical distancing can be maintained.

Lunch – staff are encouraged to go outside where possible. Some limited areas will be provided for food consumption to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Areas will be noted with appropriate signage.

Cleaning and Sanitation

Housekeeping is extremely important. Your work area should be kept clean, organized, and clear for easy disinfection.

Crothall is the external vendor responsible for cleaning and sanitation within VCH and their workers must be provided access each weekday. This is particularly important to ensure high-touch areas as well as regular cleaning can be addressed and left clean for the morning shift staff. Here are the schedules provided to us - you must work around these times to allow housekeeping to perform their work:

- Eye Care Centre: 4pm to 11 pm
- Jack Bell Research Centre: 5:30 pm to 11:30 pm
- Research Pavilion: 5:30 pm to 9 pm
- Robert Ho Research Centre: 5:30 pm to 11:30 pm

Working on weekends is not recommended in a VCHRI building, however, if you have essential work that must be carried out it is recommended you outline your request/justify the need, confirm adherence to safety measures, include a work alone policy (where applicable) and a cleaning and sanitation plan.

Human Subject Research

The clinical research process is complicated and requires coordination with many groups including the PHC, CREB, BREB, VCH for operational services, etc to develop a process and identify policies that will ensure compliance with COVID-19 requirements.

Due to this we will be separating clinical research resumption plans from all other research – details regarding the new process and policies will be forthcoming in the next week. In the meantime, researchers can continue to submit the following types of research requests *using the existing research exemption process*:

- COVID-19 research
- Current research activity exemptions as approved previously (no new research or additional related activities)
- Clinical trials concurrent with care.

Non-clinical research will follow the process as outlined in this document.

Animal-based research

All animal-based research work conducted at JBRC, ARU or ICORD requires a separate “VCHRI animal research resumption access request” form to be completed and submitted to research@vch.ca . All applications will be forwarded for review to the relevant Medical Animal Facility Manager. A copy of the form can be found on our website at <https://www.vchri.ca/covid-19-information-and-faqs>.

Medical Animal Facility Managers will discuss with the Academic Director and VCHRI where appropriate. They will approve or decline requests taking into account UBC’s prioritization guidelines, staff and resource availability, occupancy limits, cleaning and sanitation protocols, etc. Note: Facility staff must be able to perform their duties alongside approved research projects while adhering to safety measures.

This process should be completed first in order for Centre Directors to determine prioritization of overall centre projects.

Documents Required for Researchers

- Animal-based research must be submitted using a “VCHRI animal research resumption access request form”
- Each group/project must include a safety plan for all on-site research regardless of which building you are located in, which must be read and acknowledged by the Principal Investigator and all members requiring access to the space. WorkSafe BC has a [safety plan template](#) which can be used to develop your own. Special emphasis must be included to address cleaning and sanitation and PPE availability. Principal Investigators and Centre Directors are responsible for monitoring and ensuring safety measures are being adhered to. Personnel violating the plan or regulations will have their access revoked.

- The VCHRI Access Priority Template is a modified version of the UBC template which has an additional tab labelled “project information” – your Centre Director will need this information from you to incorporate into the overall “Unit level research access summary spreadsheet”
- All VCHRI forms can be found on our website at <https://www.vchri.ca/covid-19-information-and-fags>.
- NOTE: All projects using animals or biohazards must have approval from the appropriate UBC committee.

Documents Required for Centre Directors

- A summary unit plan is required and must define the process that will be implemented to manage overall occupancy
 - The plan is expected to include on-going requests that were processed via the research exemption process
- Overall safety plan for your unit which amalgamates researcher plans and takes occupancy limits into account
- The “VCHRI Unit Level Research Access Summary Spreadsheet” is a modified version of the UBC template which has an additional tab labelled “project information”. (This tab is a duplicate of the one to be completed by researchers titled “VCHRI Access Priority Template” with the intention that it can be copied by Centres to provide required data onto the “VCHRI Unit Level Research Access Summary Spreadsheet”. This form can be found on our website at <https://www.vchri.ca/covid-19-information-and-fags>.

Approval Process

1. Researchers must submit research resumption requests to their Centre Director. (Those who do not belong to a Centre must submit to the Academic Department Head. For example, the majority of the Research Pavilion groups do not belong to a centre and will submit to their Academic Department Head.)
2. The Centre Director will send an overall Centre submission as outlined in the "Documents required for Centre Directors" to VCHRI at research@vch.ca for review and approval.
3. VCHRI will review each plan submitted by the Centre Directors for non-clinical research taking UBC prioritization, safety plans, medical animal facility approvals, and building occupancy into account.
4. VCHRI will then discuss with the health authority where appropriate and once a decision is made, VCHRI will issue a notification letter to the Centre Director, who will then notify individual researchers. Note: Education and Administration are not approved via VCHRI.

To ensure the safety of our community, you must not return to the workplace prior to receiving notification that your request has been approved.

Upon receiving research resumption approval, safety plans must be posted where clearly visible. It is strongly recommended simple signage be implemented to identify occupancy limits for each space. People are more apt to follow a sign that tells them how many people can be in the lab or on the floor at any given time than by remembering a schedule.

Compliance monitoring will be the responsibility of the researcher(s) and the Centre Directors.

Process for Stage II

VCHRI will review the process for Stage I and make adjustments as needed to address the process for Stage II. Upon notification from Public Health Officials that we may begin the next phase and in coordination with UBC, a VCHRI notification will be sent to all Centre Directors.

Resources

Volunteers for research studies – you may wish to connect with REACH BC <https://www.reachbc.ca/> to help recruit Canadians who would like to participate in research studies.

These measures are in place to ensure the health and safety of all research personnel. Physical distancing and laboratory safety must be maintained at all times.

We fully understand that the initial curtailment has significantly impacted your research programs and research personnel. Our goal is to manage this next phase competently to allow for increased occupancy as quickly as possible without jeopardizing the health and safety of our personnel.

We thank you for your continuing cooperation.



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