

COVID-19 Guidelines and Considerations for Completing REB Applications for In-person Research

Research Ethics Board clearance must include assessment of the risks to participants based upon the risk-mitigation strategies implemented with respect to current pandemic conditions. This guideline is intended to help researchers address COVID-19-related risk in REB applications involving in-person research. For further guidance, consult the [Brock Research Activities During Stages of Pandemic and Recovery](#) or contact reb@brocku.ca.

Principal Investigator Responsibilities

- Principal Investigators (Faculty Supervisors) are responsible for ensuring that their research teams are trained and comply with all current Brock University COVID-19 risk-mitigation strategies and requirements.
- Provincial orders and public health guidelines are subject to change; researchers are expected to monitor changes and create conditions to safely reduce or cease activities on short notice if conditions warrant.
- When applying for REB clearance for projects that include in-person research, the following questions must be considered and addressed in the REB application.

Necessity for In-Person Research

- Is conducting in-person research the only viable option to meet the project's objectives?
- Do all aspects of the protocol need to be conducted in-person or can some be done remotely (e.g., recruitment and/or consent process, specific phases within the design)?

Risks and Benefits

- Are measures in place to mitigate COVID-19-related risks to participants with special consideration for communities and groups that may be vulnerable to COVID-19?
- Does in-person data collection offer particular benefits to (a) individual participants, (b) participants sharing common characteristics, or (c) a community or society at-large, making it a favourable approach?

Risk Assessment for In-Person Interaction

- **Contact Intensity:** What is the type of contact (direct physical, indirect, close, distant) and duration of contact (brief, prolonged)?
- **Number of contacts:** How many people will be present in the research setting at one time?
- **Location and type of in-person interaction:** What is the status of COVID-19 at the location of the research? What local practices or public health directives are in place to mitigate risk? Have you consulted with knowledgeable personnel in the relevant jurisdiction?

Risk Acknowledgement Form

- Do you have a strategy to inform participants and caregivers (if present) that they must complete the [online COVID-19 risk acknowledgement form](#) prior to their first research study visit, on- or off-campus? This information must be reconfirmed by the researcher, at each study visit.

Self-Screening

- Do you have a strategy to encourage participants and caregivers (if present) to [self-screen for symptoms](#) each day prior to in-person interaction on- or off-campus?

Vaccination, Masking, and Other Mitigation Measures

- Brock University paused its COVID-19 vaccination mandate effective July 4, 2022. Is there a reason to limit study participation to participants who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19?
- In research labs and other indoor shared research spaces on- and off-campus, medical masks are required whenever others are present. Does your study require additional protections (e.g., goggles, face shields, N95 or KN95 respirators, plexiglass dividers, etc.)?

Research Site Considerations

Research occurring on Brock University campus or property

- Does the research adhere to current, relevant Public Health guidance and Brock COVID-19 guidelines, protocols (including but not limited to recommendations for screening, PPE, physical space, and enhanced sanitation)?
- Campus access hours for shared research spaces (e.g., labs) are 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. seven days per week, including weekends and holidays. However, many on-campus supports are available during regular business hours only. Will you be scheduling any in-person interactions on evenings, weekends, or holidays? If so, have you considered the availability of sufficient support personnel?

Research occurring off Brock University campus or property

- Does the research adhere to current provincial and local public health agency and site directives, including Brock University requirements and recommendations? Note that community guidelines, restrictions, and practices may differ from site to site and are subject to change.
- The Brock University requirement to wear medical masks when others are present in research labs or other shared research spaces is intended to apply to indoor off-campus sites. Do you foresee any issues complying with this expectation in your study? Any additional PPE requirements will be established on a case-by-case basis.