



14 March 2020

Vice-President Research Statement on the Functioning of REBs and Research Ethics Office During Unforeseen Circumstances

On Friday March 13, Brock University announced the suspension of in-person course delivery for the balance of the Winter 2020 academic semester, as well as the cancellation of inessential university travel and events at least until June 1, 2020. These decisions were made in response to the public health situation created by the COVID-19 novel coronavirus, declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11.

This letter signals the activation of the provisions of the [guidelines on the functioning of the REBs and Research Ethics Office during unforeseen circumstances](#), as drafted and approved by the Brock University Research Ethics Boards.

The guidelines in question anticipate conditions of pandemic. They contemplate mild, moderate, and severe circumstances, and relate these categories both to ongoing projects having REB approval, and to new projects for review. The current recommendation is a hybrid that reflects the character of the current institutional environment and wider health concerns.

For ongoing projects, the recommendation is drawn from the *Severe* category. Under the guidelines, this entails that:

- Unless otherwise directed by the VPR, research activities may continue with caution under the following circumstances:
 - the emergency or pandemic does not impose any additional threat to participant safety or comfort (e.g., exposure to communicable disease, dangers accessing the research location, etc.);
 - the required support services necessary for participant safety are available to respond (e.g., campus security, lab support staff, etc.);
 - where ceasing activity may pose a risk to participant safety or otherwise negatively affect the risk-benefit ratio.
- Review will occur in priority at the discretion of the REO and will be restricted to the permitted research listed above.

Implications of these guidelines include that researchers are responsible for implementing reasonable steps for protecting research staff and research participants. The importance of

basic protective measures including handwashing, cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, respiratory hygiene, practicing social distancing, and staying home when unwell cannot be overstated. Delays or modifications may be needed if the research cannot be conducted while maintaining safe personal distance from others.

For new projects, the recommendation is drawn from the *Moderate* option, meaning that:

- Pandemic-related studies are top priority, using procedures for time-sensitive review;
- Other studies will be processed and reviewed as resources and circumstances allow.

This is an evaluation that I take to afford the REBs the latitude to prioritize and process reviews according to their assessment of evolving circumstances and available resources.

With thanks to all for due care and attention to these guidelines, and best wishes for the safe and responsible conduct of research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Kenyon', written in a cursive style.

Tim Kenyon
Vice-President, Research