

REB Guideline: Functioning of REO and REB During Unforeseen Circumstances

Current Status: Approved and Posted

Date introduced: Unknown

Last reviewed: November 2017

1. Chair has conflict of interest in a file.

An experienced REB member will be designated and responsible for the file, including but not limited to:

- a. Any change requests, annual reports, final reports, etc., while the conflict of interest exists.
- b. If full review: will compile the master list, select the discussion questions, and run any portion of the REB meeting associated with the file.

2. Chair is unavailable for one meeting.

- An experienced REB member will run the meeting.

3. Chair is unavailable for an extended period of time.

- Chair of the other REB will run meetings. They will also approve applications.

4. REO staff absence for an extended period of time.

- a. It is essential that the REO maintains a critical level of staffing to provide adequate research oversight. For quasi-normal administrative functions, at least one member of the office must be able to work in the office or from home (with internet connection and access to the REB email account and the Research Ethics shared drive), with at least one REB Chair (or designated REB member) available by telephone or email. Staff members will provide the Office of Research Services (ORS) with their contact information if working at home. If the minimum oversight requirements cannot be met, ethics applications will not be processed.
- b. In the event of a prolonged absence of both REO staff, the Chair will request that the ORS administrative assistant contact ITS to arrange an 'Out of Office' notification for the REB email account.
- c. Further arrangements will be made between the Chair(s) and the Vice President of Research (VPR) on a case-to-case basis.

5. REB functioning in the event of a strike.

REO staff should be available to work, no matter which union is on strike (BUFA or CUPE).

- a. If BUFA is on strike no files can be processed and no decisions can be made as the REB is primarily composed of faculty (BUFA) members.
- b. If the CUPE local for TAs, instructors etc. is on strike, work can continue using REO staff, faculty, graduate students, and community members, however videoconferencing at meetings may be needed for those members who do not wish to cross CUPE picket lines. Since serving on the REB is outside of CUPE-mandated duties for graduate students, they may choose to continue in the event of a strike. The Chair will determine whether videoconferencing is appropriate and sufficient on a case-by-case basis.
- c. If the CUPE local for administrative staff is on strike work can continue, however videoconferencing at meetings may be needed for those members who do not wish to cross CUPE picket lines. The Chair will determine whether videoconferencing is appropriate and sufficient on a case-by-case basis.

6. REB unable to meet due to emergency/pandemic situation.

Emergency/Pandemic Plan for Office of Research Ethics

During a time of emergency, such as pandemic illness, it is essential that research continues to have proper oversight, particularly for research that either focuses on the pandemic itself, or poses risk to participants. In order to ensure that the Research Ethics Boards (REBs) and Research Ethics Office (REO) continues to provide quality oversight, it is important that a plan be in place for when such emergencies arise.

The following is a plan primarily for pandemic illness, but may be used as a basis for other emergency situations. The situation will undergo frequent evaluation by the Manager Research Ethics and the REB Chairs in discussion with the Vice President, Research (VPR).

Three phases of emergency situation:

Mild - minor debilitation to the system;

Moderate - some debilitation to the system, but no declared emergency;

Severe - extremely debilitating to the system, likely declared as an emergency; university closure.

The declaration of an emergency situation may be made in relation to the REB(s) or REO by the university President, VPR, or authorized public official. The REB(s) and REO will endeavour to return to normal operating procedures as soon as possible after the President, VPR or authorized public official has declared that the emergency is over.

It is essential that the REO maintains a critical level of staffing to provide adequate research oversight. See note above (3. a). As there are two research ethics persons in the REO, one will have to be identified as an alternate for the other in the case that one of them is being quarantined. In the case of both being unavailable, researchers will be 1) notified that there will be delay in the processing of applications, and 2) encouraged to take precautions and if possible delay their research activities to reduce the possibility of spreading disease and experiments should be interrupted for the duration of the closure in order to reduce the potential of spreading the virus.

The approval of any proposal shall follow the TCPS2 guidelines and in the case of full review, the REB must meet quorum (see REB Guideline: Meetings, Quorum, and Attendance). However, if the risk is increasing researchers will be notified immediately that there is going to be a delay in the processing of their application until quorum can be met.

Emergency / Pandemic Plan for Research

A. Ongoing projects

Mild to Moderate Circumstances

- Studies may continue at the discretion of the Principal Investigator (PI);
- Review will occur in priority at the discretion of the REO.

Severe Circumstances

- 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.

B. New projects

Mild to Moderate Circumstances

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

Severe Circumstances

- Only time-sensitive pandemic-related studies will be reviewed.

Communication

In the event of a REO staff absence for an extended period, an emergency/pandemic circumstance, or a strike, specific information regarding the REO and REB will be provided via REO voicemail and e-mail autoreplies.