



COVID-19 Requirements

1.0 General guidance

UHREB acknowledges that implications of COVID-19 on research and public health are continually evolving. In the context of changes to [Public Health Orders](#) within Manitoba, the following changes are being implemented by UHREB as of November 15, 2022, with regards to ethical review of research:

- 1) A face-to-face checklist is no longer required.
- 2) A separate COVID-19 safety plan is not required for projects where the risk of COVID is deemed no greater than participants or researchers encounter in their normal daily activities.
- 3) The WebGrants check box for “research in a publicly declared emergency” should not be checked.
- 4) Risk mitigation strategies related to COVID-19 should continue to be detailed in the protocol and informed consent, proportionate to the likelihood and magnitude of the potential harms.

As COVID-19 continues to pose health risks, researchers should ensure that the safety of their research team members and participants remains a high priority. In cases where the investigator or UHREB determines the likelihood or magnitude of COVID-19 risk is elevated, or that participants may be more vulnerable to COVID-19 infection or adverse outcomes, investigators should include more detailed risk mitigation. Although no longer required of all applications, UHREB may request the above documents on a case-by-case basis.

2.0 Considerations for research in the COVID-19 pandemic

At the time of writing, COVID-19 continues to be present within the community, including resulting in hospitalization, long-term health consequences, and mortality. Beyond the risk to physical health, the following are aspects researchers should consider in response to the COVID-19 pandemic: https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/nr-cp_2020-09-02.html

2.1 Remote communication: researchers should be mindful that remote communication introduces new risks and ethics issues related to privacy and confidentiality of information when using digital platforms and home offices, and there is a need for new security and safety measures to protect participants' information.

2.2 Fairness and Equity: researchers should be mindful that only those with access and ability to participate remotely (e.g. due to internet connectivity, computer/ smart phone availability and capacity) will have the opportunity to choose to participate increasing the risk of participant exclusion in recruitment.

2.3 Vulnerable groups/population: researchers should be mindful that vulnerabilities can include psychological factors such as isolation, stress, anxiety, or economic circumstances created by financial burdens of the pandemic or unemployment.

2.3.1 Vulnerabilities can also be social in nature resulting from limited access to critical services, or restricted physical abilities caused by pre-existing medical conditions or age.



The Tri-Council Secretariat has published [guidelines](https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/nr-cp_2020-09-02.html), in particular section 6D, on human ethics review during the COVID-19 crisis and issued some public interpretations addressing topics related to the conduct and ethics review of research during COVID-19 at this link: https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/nr-cp_2020-09-02.html.

3.0 Risk Mitigation and COVID-19

Risks related to COVID-19 may vary depending upon the methodology, population, location and other aspects of research. Investigators should carefully consider the risks of COVID-19 that are relevant to their research. Risks and risk mitigation should be considered for participants, as well as the investigator and other members of the research team.

Risks specific to COVID-19 and the mitigation strategies should be delineated on consent forms and clearly explained as part of informed consent. Investigators may want to consider risk mitigation strategies in the same context as inclusion criteria (i.e. as necessary conditions for participation in the research). Below are suggestions on how investigators can mitigate COVID-19 risks within their research protocols:

- Replace face-to-face with virtual interactions, where feasible (e.g. interviews, surveys)
- Conduct face-to-face interactions in well-ventilated or outdoor spaces.
- Encourage the use of vaccinations for the researcher, their team, and/or participants.
- For interactions that occur indoors, use physical distancing and consider limiting attendance to the minimum necessary individuals.
- Use personal protective equipment, such as N95 or medical grade masks, or face shields.
- Implement sanitation practices, such as provision of hand sanitizer, cleaning of frequently touched surfaces, and regular hand washing (in addition to standard disinfection of laboratory equipment).
- Use COVID-19 screening tools for members of the research team and participants. Reschedule activities if individuals feel unwell, are showing any symptoms of COVID-19, have tested positive for COVID-19 recently, or are a close contact of a positive case.
- Ensure the research is conducted in accordance with COVID-19 protocols and guidelines of stakeholder organizations (e.g., community-based collaborators). Should these community protocols change, the researcher will amend the protocol and consent form to ensure it meets the standards of the community, to ensure the safety of all participants.