UVic Human Research Ethics COVID-19 Bulletin #2

Guidance for the Resumption of In-person Research with Human Participants Under COVID-19 Restrictions

Date: June 2, 2020
To: Faculty and Student Researchers
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This Bulletin outlines current guidance for the safe and gradual resumption of in-person research activities with human participants in studies under the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) to minimize the spread of COVID-19 during the global pandemic.

Guidance will be updated in a following Bulletin later this month (See details at end of this document.)

The guidance applies to research involving human participants in clinical and behavioural research conducted in UVic campus facilities (on-campus) and in community settings (off-campus) - locally, nationally, and internationally.

The Board’s operations are grounded in the Tri-Council Policy Statement for Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans (TCPS2 2018), specifically Chapter 6 Research Ethics Review During Publicly Declared Emergencies. Article 6.23:

“[R]esearch ethics review during publicly declared emergencies is even more important than under normal circumstances, and may require even greater care, since everyone (participants, researchers and REB members themselves) may be rendered more vulnerable by the nature of the emergency” (p.88).

“Recognizing and respecting the principle of Justice means that research ethics review policies and procedures for publicly declared emergencies shall be used in a manner that is not discriminatory or arbitrary. The commitment to justice advances a fair and balanced distribution of risks and potential benefits even in the face of public emergencies” (p.89).

“The increased public risks and devastation that cause public emergencies to be declared can threaten autonomy and physical, emotional, institutional and social welfare or safety. They also bring inherent tensions and pressures that may impact deliberative decision making. Taking all of this into consideration, REBs [research ethics boards] and researchers should ensure that the risks and potential benefits posed by any proposed research are appropriately evaluated, including provisions for greater than normal attention to risk, where applicable” (p.89).

In order to operationalize our responsibility to minimize potential risks to participants during the current publicly declared emergency (COVID-19 global pandemic) and provide guidance to researchers specifically regarding conducting “in-person behavioral research with human participants,” the HREB is using the following
updates and documents from the UVic Response to COVID-19 (coronavirus) website, the purpose of which is “to provide the university community with the most up-to-date information about COVID-19...”

- **In-person behavioral research involving human participants at locations on or off campus is suspended effective immediately and until further notice.** Research involving human participants where the contact is through remote (online, telephone) methods may continue. (Dr. Lisa Kalynchuk, Vice-President Research, March 20, 2020)

- **UVic Principles and Guidance for the Resumption of On-Campus Research under COVID-19 Restrictions** (May 13, 2020). Excerpts: “In-person behavioral research is possible but should be conducted online or through teleconference whenever possible” (p.2). “For in-person behavioral research conducted off-campus, only approval from the human research ethics board is required” (p.2).

- **Resumption of on-campus activities** (U Vic COVID-19 update, May 28, 2020). Excerpt: “What is clear is that the government’s Restart Plan contemplates that remote teaching, learning and working will continue to feature as one core physical distancing strategy to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 for many months to come and to reduce contact intensity and the number of contacts.”

At this time, based on the preceding information, the HREB advises researchers to continue to use remote methods (e.g. recruitment, data collection, consent etc.) for research involving human participants. Until further notice, research ethics approval will continue to be granted only to studies using remote/virtual activities. The ethics office will continue to receive and review all applications, including amendments to switch in-person activities to remote/virtual methods.

Resources: [FAQ on Conducting Research Virtually with Human Participants](#)

The Human Research Ethics Board recognizes that, while it is feasible for some research projects to continue with, or switch over to remote activities, the characteristics and context of a given project may limit the extent to which it will be possible to resume, amend, or initiate new in-person activities at this time. Interim solutions include using an incremental approach starting with virtual methods first or refashioning the study without human participants (for the time being) as faculty and student researchers plan for the weeks and months ahead.

UVic is continuing to follow the advice of the Public Health Agency of Canada and the provincial health officer in this rapidly evolving situation (U Vic COVID-19 website). The HREB is committed to revising guidelines for the safe and gradual resumption of in-person research activities with human participants conducted by UVic researchers as new information for the post-secondary sector becomes available. Please contact the research ethics office if you or your student requires guidance ethics@uvic.ca Updates and instructions will be posted on the [human research ethics homepage](#).

In the coming weeks, we will issue instructions for researchers proposing to “resume their paused” studies or initiate new studies with in-person activities on-campus or in community (off-campus) locales. Going forward, such studies will need to meet [additional COVID-19 human research ethics requirements](#).