

Research Involving Human Participants and COVID – Bulletin #6

August 11, 2022

COVID-19 has presented unprecedented challenges for research communities across British Columbia (BC). The UNBC Office of Research and Innovation and Research Ethics Board (REB) thank you for your continued diligence and commitment to fostering safe research practices. These bulletins serve to highlight new and emerging considerations for research involving human participants.

In all cases, researchers are asked to review any new or updated Provincial Health Office (PHO) [guidance](#) before finalizing and submitting new ethics applications, amendments, or annual renewals. **It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure all on-campus and off-campus research activities meet the current PHO orders, as well as any community-based policies or protocols.**

Mask and Vaccination Mandates

While wearing masks in public indoor settings is not required by the current PHO, and is considered a personal choice, the UNBC REB and Office of Research and Innovation recommend that researchers be vaccinated and use a suitable mask (e.g., N95 or KN95 masks) for all in-person research at this time. At minimum, masks should be three layered and have no air gaps on the face. Researchers should make masks available for participants, but participants can choose if they wish to wear them. Masks continue to be required within healthcare settings, including vaccination clinics and hospitals, as well as during any air or federally regulated travel. Proof of vaccination is no longer required.

Safe Research Plan

The **routine submission of a safe research plan for research involving human participants is no longer required, however**, researchers are asked to **consider and respond to the need of communities and participants**. Researchers are expected to continue to adhere to BC Provincial Health Orders and are asked to **complete a safe research plan for research involving populations that may face increased risk of COVID-19, or communities where local policies and protocols are in place**. Examples may include:

- Research involving participants living with medical complexity, including those that are at increased risk of COVID-19 or associated complications;
- Research in geographical areas where COVID-19 infection rates or public health orders may differ from those in BC;

- Research with Indigenous nations or communities where local COVID-19 protocols, policies, and permissions are in place;
- Research that is hosted within external organizations (e.g., health authority facilities or hospitals)

The UNBC REB application forms and [PHO-indexed grid](#) have been updated to reflect these changes. If you are unclear whether you need to submit a safe research plan, please contact the REB directly.

Being prepared

As a reminder, it is likely that PHO orders will continue to evolve and may change with little notice. Researchers who propose to use in-person activities must be prepared for a sudden shut down in the event of new health directives and advisories from the BC government, WorkSafe BC, public health, Indigenous nations, and regional, national, and international regulatory bodies.

With thanks,

Dr. Davina Banner, Chair, Research Ethics Board
Dr. Chelsea Pelletier, Vice-Chair, Research Ethics Board
Dr. Kathy Lewis, Interim Vice-President, Research and Innovation

Helpful Resources:

[Culturally Safe and Trauma-Informed Practices for Researchers during COVID-19.pdf \(bcahsn.ca\)](#).

B.C.'s response to COVID-19: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/covid-19/info/response>