

Utah Water Research Laboratory COVID-19 Operations Plan

May 12, 2021

This Operation Plan provides specific guidance for employees of the Utah Water Research Laboratory (UWRL) as we adjust and respond to the ongoing pandemic. These guidelines are designed to minimize the risk of exposure to faculty, students, employees, and the public. This plan will remain in place until USU sends notification regarding the lifting of COVID-19 limitations and the return to a “new normal.”

Guiding Principles

1. Follow USU, local, and state public health authority directives.
2. Protect the health and safety of the UWRL community.
3. Recognize the uncertainty and evolving nature of the COVID-19 situation, and promote a culture of informed individual and collective responsibility for safety in the UWRL.
4. Remain productively engaged in research.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect students and employees at the Utah Water Research Laboratory. It is essential that everyone stay informed by following credible news and authoritative recommendations such as those from the CDC, State, and University and act with common sense and wise judgment to take personal responsibility for the safety of themselves and others around them.

Helpful resources for COVID safety and response include:

- Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information for Utah State University <http://www.usu.edu/COVID-19>
- USU Research COVID-19 Website <https://research.usu.edu/covid19/>
- State of Utah <https://coronavirus.utah.gov/utah-leads-together/>
- Utah System of Higher Education COVID-19 updated <https://ushe.edu/ushe-covid-19/>
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

This UWRL operations plan does not supersede USU policies; rather it should be used in conjunction with these policies and is intended to provide specific UWRL plans that are consistent with these policies.

Employee Work Schedules

1. Working from home (telework/remote work) is still allowed and encouraged for those who can do so effectively or who are at high-risk or caring for someone who is high-risk. However, supervisors are encouraged to seek safe ways for employees who have been working at home to return to on-site work as the employee is comfortable doing so (for example, by utilizing mask and social distancing protocols or becoming vaccinated. See <https://www.usu.edu/covid-19/testing/vaccine>).
 2. Supervisors and employees will coordinate schedules for at-home and on site work.
 3. Employees with their own single-occupancy offices may work on site.
 4. Physical distancing continues to be required for employees and student teams who work in shared offices, workspaces, and laboratories. Office set-ups will incorporate a physical barrier or at least 6 ft. of separation between workstations, and employees will not be located adjacent to or facing each other. Supervisors are encouraged to arrange for employees in shared workspaces to stagger work schedules to maximize physical distancing.
 5. The Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) developed by each faculty member, principal investigator, and/or laboratory lead, outline specific practices adopted for the areas where they have responsibility. Supervisors are asked to follow their submitted SOP for their individual research team and/or students.
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Employee Safety Guidelines

1. Follow USU's COVID-19 hygiene standards (<https://www.usu.edu/covid-19/staying-healthy/prevention>).
 2. Wear a face covering inside the UWRL in accordance with the USU face coverings guidelines <https://www.usu.edu/covid-19/staying-healthy/face-coverings>. The receptionist will maintain a supply of disposable facemasks for visitors or anyone who does not have one.
 3. Follow USU guidelines for social distancing (<https://www.usu.edu/covid-19/staying-healthy/social-distancing>).
 4. Schedule meetings in spaces that facilitate physical distancing and/or use web-conferencing tools.
 5. Use email and/or messaging services like Slack for coordination and communication of activities and schedules to minimize in-person meetings.
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Facility Protocols to Protect Employees

1. Employees who feel sick or experience any COVID-19 symptoms should isolate themselves immediately and follow USU guidelines (see <https://www.usu.edu/covid-19/if-you-are-sick/>)
2. USU-approved COVID-19 signage that lists COVID-19 symptoms has been posted at entrances to the UWRL.
3. Cleaning supplies have been obtained and will be resupplied so employees can clean high-touch surfaces as needed, particularly in shared areas like conference rooms.
4. Conference room capacities have been reduced to facilitate physical distancing as posted in each: **Third floor: 10 people, Mezzanine: 4 people, First Floor: 4 people**
5. Chairs in the reception area will be located more than 6-ft apart.
6. Unless doing so will create a privacy, data security, fire, or other security risk, internal doors may be propped open to increase ventilation and avoid the use of door handles.

7. This plan will be reviewed with students and employees occasionally through email communications. New employees will be given specific instructions and guidance regarding the UWRL COVID safety plan.
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Travel

Travel Authorization

1. Travel is allowed following USU travel guidelines (<https://www.usu.edu/covid-19/operations/travel>).
2. For all travel, USU recommends limiting out-of-state travel, avoiding travel to high-risk locations, and following CDC guidelines when a person does travel (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/>)

UWRL Vehicle Use

1. Face coverings continue to be required in USU vehicles when riding with others (see <https://www.usu.edu/covid-19/staying-healthy/face-coverings>)
2. For longer trips, separate vehicles may be used.
3. If a research project is unable to pay for the extra expenses incurred through use of multiple vehicles, the PI may request funding as needed to support the additional vehicle costs. The UWRL will provide funding for the extra vehicle costs from WA-2.3 (Travel). Approval of these additional expenses below \$200 is automatic. Approval of additional travel expenses above \$200 should be obtained in advance by emailing the director.

Vehicle Cleaning and Disinfection Plan

UWRL vehicles will be disinfected prior to each use as outlined in the UWRL Vehicle Disinfection Plan (<https://uwrl.usu.edu/files/pdf/covid/uwrl-c19-vehiclecleaning.pdf>)

1. UWRL Business Office Staff will clean and disinfect each vehicle that has been returned to the UWRL before it can be checked out by another person.
 2. Two disinfection protocols have been approved: wet disinfection and/or ozone disinfection. Wet disinfection will occur in each vehicle following each use. Ozone disinfection will be used only when a user of the vehicle indicates having COVID-19 symptoms or tests positive for the COVID-19 virus within one week after use.
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Field Work

COVID-19 General Field Safety Plan

The UWRL COVID-19 or Other Infectious Disease General Field Safety Plan (<https://uwrl.usu.edu/files/pdf/covid/uwrl-c19-fieldsafety.pdf>) describes UWRL field safety protocols specific to COVID-19 safety when the State of Utah is under any Health Guidance Level other than Low

Transmission (<https://coronavirus.utah.gov>) and/or the University is at any stage of its Infectious Disease Response other than level 5 or 4 (“Normal conditions” or “Increased Readiness”).

Fieldwork

1. All fieldwork should be conducted following the field activity and sampling (if any) procedures developed by the PI as part of their standard operations.
 2. Field activities should minimize tool and equipment sharing (e.g., one employee operates a field computer, while the other installs sensors and dataloggers).
 3. Any member of the field team may veto a field activity plan without penalty if they feel it will be unsafe, and project leaders may not override such disagreements, but continue to work with the field team until all agree on the protocols and feel safe.
 4. Field team members should adhere to USU’s guidance on face coverings (<https://www.usu.edu/covid-19/staying-healthy/face-coverings>) and prevention (<https://www.usu.edu/covid-19/staying-healthy/prevention>). This includes minimizing work closer than six feet apart to the extent possible and not participating in field activities if currently exhibiting or having experienced COVID symptoms within the last 14 days.
 5. PI’s and or field team leads are to ensure sufficient hand sanitizing supplies are available for the team while in the field.
 6. Any additional COVID-19 specific procedures needed for fieldwork should be described in Standard Operating Procedures developed by faculty and research team leads to augment this document and existing (pre-COVID) Field Safety Protocols that are already in place. These individual COVID-19-specific safety plans are available upon request from Steve Barfuss at steve.barfuss@usu.edu.
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Meetings, Events, and Visitors

Meetings

Meetings should be conducted using virtual systems (e.g., Zoom, Webex) where possible. In-person meetings among UWRL faculty, staff, students and visitors should follow USU guidelines for physical distancing and room occupancy and cleaning (<https://www.usu.edu/covid-19/operations/teaching-lab-protocols>).

Events

Events (e.g., conferences, workshops and organized open meetings) that include external visitors and participants require approval from the central university committee. See <https://www.usu.edu/covid-19/operations/gatherings> for USU guidelines for events and gatherings.

Visitors

A visitor is anyone not employed by or registered as a student at Utah State University. Visitors to the UWRL are limited to those with official business and must be pre-approved per USU policy (<https://www.usu.edu/covid-19/operations/travel>).

- **GROUPS OF UP TO 10 VISITORS** are currently permitted. Hosts may request approval for larger groups if they establish appropriate protocols for lab and visitor safety. **Request visitor approval using the Pre-Travel Visitor Approval Request Form links in the Visitor Pre-Approval Request Process section below.**
- **APPROVAL** will be granted for visitors following the CDC guidelines for safe travel (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>). However, visitors should delay travel (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/when-to-delay-travel.html>) and cancel their visit if, in the 14 days prior to the visit, they (1) receive a positive COVID-19 test result, (2) develop symptoms of COVID-19, or (3) have been around someone diagnosed with or suspected of having COVID-19 (unless they have recovered from COVID-19 within the past 3 months or are fully vaccinated).

Visitor Pre-Travel Approval Request Process

Guidelines for visitors are outlined on the COVID-19 Pre-Travel Visitor Approval Request Form linked below. These guidelines are in effect until USU authorities notify us to remove the COVID-19 restrictions. To request visitor approval:

1. Complete form(s) (one per visitor) and email to Mindy Whitely at uwrl.receptionist@usu.edu.
2. Please allow at least two days for director approval.

Download UWRL COVID-19 Pre-Travel Visitor Approval Request Form (print PDF) at <https://uwrl.usu.edu/files/pdf/covid/uwrl-c19-visitor-form-4-23-21-print.pdf>.

Download UWRL COVID-19 Pre-Travel Visitor Approval Request Form (fillable PDF) at <https://uwrl.usu.edu/files/pdf/covid/uwrl-c19-visitor-form-4-23-21-fillable.pdf>.

Training and Communication Plan

1. This plan was emailed to department employees and discussed at a UWRL web conference to answer any employee questions.
2. Supervisors will monitor (using passive observation) their onsite employees for potential symptoms and send employees home who exhibit symptoms.
3. Supervisors/administrators will inform the Business Services Office to initiate vehicle ozone cleaning if an employee tests positive for Covid-19 test or experiences symptoms after driving a lab vehicle within the past week and will help in alerting others who may have used the same vehicle in the interim of a potential exposure via vehicle surfaces.
4. The UWRL has posted USU-approved signage setting expectations for staying home when sick, respiratory hygiene and etiquette, and workplace behavior.
5. Employees who contract COVID-19 should comply with all related USU COVID-19 policies: <https://www.usu.edu/covid-19/if-you-are-sick/>.

Utah COVID-19 Health Guidance Levels and Return to Normal

These policies will remain in place until USU authorities remove COVID-19 restrictions. A transition of Cache Valley to a Low Transmission Level does not alter these plans as face coverings, social distancing and other COVID-19 safety measures are still strongly recommended and may be required locally under Utah's Health Guidance Levels (see <https://coronavirus.utah.gov/utah-health-guidance-levels/>).

Individual Plans

Each UWRL research lead has established an approved COVID-19 plan to ensure the safety of his/her research team. These plans are available upon request by contacting Steve Barfuss at: steve.barfuss@usu.edu.
