Texas State University

Field Research Travel Guidelines

These guidelines are focused on proactive, preventative measures where each individual is situationally aware of the risks from exposure to COVID-19 and steps are taken to address those risks for the safety and health of all field research team personnel (hereafter ‘team members’). The situation continues to evolve and these guidelines are dynamic, please review additions and amendments as issued.

1. **Prior to Initiating Field Research**
   1. All relevant trainings and permissions must be completed and/or obtained prior to initiation of field work to include (if applicable):
      1. University Travel request routed and approved
      2. IACUC, IRB approval
      3. State and Federal permits
      4. Landowner/homeowner consent
      5. If overnight, lodging permission at field site facilities (e.g. field stations, federal/state bunkhouse)
      6. Formal written/email approval by funding agency/entity to continue collecting data in the field
   2. The P.I. should make available appropriate safety and sanitizing equipment and supplies to team members for their field research. For face masks, it is likely that a team member will provide their own face mask and any other personal hygiene supplies needed. If a team member does not have a face mask, they can be issued one by the P.I. For sanitizing field equipment, vehicles and accommodations (if applicable), the P.I. should make available those appropriate sanitizing supplies for the team members.
   3. Before initiating travel, each team member going into the field should do a health self-assessment and not depart for the field if feeling ill, having a temperature > 100 degree Fahrenheit, and/or showing any COVID-19 symptoms and report their unavailability to the P.I. Similarly, team members should be proactive regarding any contact with persons that have subsequently tested positive for the virus or become ill within the two weeks prior to initiating field-work. Any team member that cannot meet this criteria should defer such work pending a two- week period of self-quarantine.
   4. The P.I. should create and review a written contingency plan with the field research crew(s) for the response if one or more team member(s) becomes sick or is no longer willing to risk conducting field research. If traveling overnight, this should also include a contingency plan to isolate team member(s) showing COVID-19 symptoms, seek COVID-19 testing as soon as possible and minimize risk to the remainder of the field crew to continue field work, if appropriate.
   5. Faculty, staff, students and technicians must not be compelled to engage in travel and field work if they are not comfortable in conducting the work. The P.I. will inform their team members that they have the right to refuse to engage in field research and obtain positive consent of their willingness to participate and assume the risks involved.
2. **Special Considerations for Field Research Operation Plan**
   1. Transportation to/from field sites
      1. Maintain awareness of current restrictions (e.g. shelter-in-place) and guidelines as provided by the CDC, Governor’s Office, county, city and any other state where the field work is conducted. If the field crew is part of designated essential personnel, the individuals should have the appropriate printed notification and a printed copy of 20-0319 CISA memo in each vehicle.
      2. Maintain social distancing as practicable in vehicles to possibly include:
         1. 1-2 person per vehicle
         2. Driver plus one person per passenger seat row (i.e. driver and one person per row in passenger van)
         3. Face masks should be worn by driver and all passengers
         4. If possible, travel with windows open
      3. Vehicle interiors should be sanitized before and at the end of each field day
         1. High touch areas (e.g., keys, door handles, seats, arm rests and steering wheel) should be disinfected before and after the field day.
      4. Limit stops to/from field sites only for refueling
      5. PI creates and maintain a log of all individuals who participate on each individual field trip. For the purposes of contact tracing.
   2. **Lodging and/or long term stays**
      1. Ensure lodging (sleeping areas) is sufficient to maintain social distancing (i.e. single rooms, single tents)
      2. If individuals have to share sleeping quarters, other field activities should be arranged to maximize these interactions such as scheduled eating times, riding in vehicles, etc. while limiting interactions with others in the group. Any field team that includes individuals that currently are cohabitating (e.g. spouse, partners, roommates), those individuals should be ideally paired for all activities to include transportation and lodging.
      3. In common areas (e.g. kitchen, bathroom), sterilize all surfaces, countertops, lavatories, before and after use. Field team members need to wash their hands for > 20 seconds when first entering these common areas.
   3. **Operation of other modes of transportation**
      1. If boats are used, each boat will have a maximum number of total personnel based on vessel length.
         1. Vessels less than 20 feet will be limited to crew of two
         2. Vessels between 20-27 feet are limited to a crew of three
         3. Vessels greater than 27 feet are limited to a crew of four.
      2. If all-terrain/off-road vehicles (e.g. UTVs) are used, 1 person per vehicle is recommended unless the vehicle has multiple rows of seats.
   4. **Mitigating risks at field site**
      1. Remote field work changes the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in a variety of ways. Traveling to a remote site may bring individuals from multiple locations to the same location thereby enhancing the risk as people arrive.
      2. Be aware before traveling, if possible, of proximity to others (apart from field crew) that may also be using the field site and/or facilities (e.g. agency bunkhouse shared by multiple users). Proactively assuming contamination of the shared facilities and disinfecting the site upon arrival should be a normal practice.
      3. If the field site involves going into homes, offices, buildings, the P.I. needs to adhere to the guidelines utilized by frontline personnel that are routinely entering such locations, including appropriate PPE and other actions to mitigate risk of exposure to field crew.
      4. It is recognized that in some cases field crews may comprise personnel that are currently living in the same domicile (e.g. cohabitation) or otherwise, normally, in close contact. While this does reflect an underlying proximity, work conditions should still be followed where appropriate to prevent transmission of the virus in the field or after exposure to persons outside of that relationship.