



## THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

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### **Mona Campus Research Ethics Committee Guidelines on conducting face to face research in light of Covid-19**

As restriction guidelines change, many researchers are beginning to restart research which was halted because of COVID-19 or initiate planned research using face to face recruitment and participation.

This is a recommendation from MCREC on how to do this safely. These guidelines are being given with the understanding that even without them, it is the expectation that upon receiving ethical approval, researchers will take the steps necessary to ensure the ethical principles underpinning the Declaration of Helsinki are observed.

Careful assessment of the risks and burdens should be made and balanced against the foreseeable benefits to the participant and the community and strategies to reduce risk and burden must be employed. Developing a checklist to evaluate benefits, risks, mitigation strategies to reduce risks of the specific research may be helpful.

Of course if research can be conducted using appropriate online tools and methodologies, this would be preferred.

This pandemic has placed us in uncharted waters and it is recognized that as things unfold, recommendations on how to manage during COVID-19 may also change. We ask that you try to keep current and make adjustments as needed, in order to ensure that your research is conducted safely.

The MCREC needs to be advised of any change in the conduct of previously approved research.

### **What are some of the relevant considerations regarding safety when conducting face to face research?**

#### **Safety of:**

1. Participants
2. Researchers
3. Others who may facilitate the research such as:
  - a. Phlebotomists other laboratory staff who may need to handle specimens or samples
  - b. Drivers or those who transport researchers and research participants  
(List not exhaustive)

4. Others who may be in the vicinity of recruitment and/or data collection areas

### **How to do this safely**

1. **Screen research team members and participants for risk of COVID-19.**

The provision of a screening tool will allow potential participants to self-exclude or will alert a member of the research team (including facilitators) that they should have COVID-19 ruled out before proceeding.

Researchers, facilitators and participants should not be immediately engaged in research if anyone of the following applies:

- Travel or contact with someone who has returned from overseas in the last 14 days
- Contact with a confirmed case in the last 14 days
- Respiratory tract symptoms-new cough, shortness of breath, wheezing
- Loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Diarrhoea
- Fever
- Headache
- Fatigue

2. **Assess environment in which the research is taking place to ensure safety level for participants and researchers.**

Have measures been put in place to ensure the appropriate infection prevention and control measures are being observed? Some of the measures that should be implemented include but are not limited to the following:

- Limit numbers to allow appropriate physical distancing (scheduling of participants; spacing of focus group participants)
- Appropriate physical distancing between interviewer and interviewee
- Adequate waiting area to allow physical distancing of participants
- Appropriate masks (which vary depending on what is being done) for participants and researchers
- Regular disinfecting of chairs, touch surfaces
- Face shields for researchers where applicable
- Use of gloves and impervious gowns for research involving the handling of blood/body fluids or when otherwise indicated
- Use of other personal protective equipment as needed (shoe and hair covers)
- Hand washing and hand sanitizing stations for participants and staff

- Bathroom facilities which are sanitized after each visit
- Proper facilities for the handling and disposal of waste (including used PPE)

\*When in doubt, contact a member of your local infection control team or the public health department for the parish for further guidance and information.

**3. Assess activities related to transportation of research participants to and from research site i.e. Public or private transport (consider the need to provide transportation to and from research sites)**

If providing transportation for participants, how will the safety of the driver and participants be ensured en route. Some things to think about (not an exhaustive list) are:

- Bus sanitization
- Hand sanitizing at boarding
- Masks for driver and participants
- Physical distancing of driver, e.g., no front seat or second seat passengers

Persons taking public transportation will also need to have available to them the same protocols as for private transportation and if this is not possible researchers need to reconsider alternative ways to safely access these participants.

**NB:** The ethics committee will arrange to audit some of the research facilities on an ad hoc basis to ensure that both researchers and participants are following appropriate guidelines.