

Dear Fresno State Research Community:

On behalf of the University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects, I'm writing with guidance regarding ethical practices for the continuation of research involving human subjects during campus and community efforts to limit exposure to the coronavirus.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends for everyone avoiding crowds and putting physical distance between social contacts. Stronger precautions, including avoiding social contact with any potentially contagious individuals, are recommended for high-risk groups, which include older adults, those with serious chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease, and those with compromised immune systems.

In light of these recommendations, we strongly urge all study personnel to do the following immediately:

1. Exercise extreme caution when conducting in-person human subjects research with individuals, and pursue alternative methods of data collection, such as phone or computer-mediated interviews, whenever possible;
2. Avoid all research procedures that involve direct observation or interaction with groups larger than 10 people where social distancing is not feasible;
3. Pause study procedures that involve in-person interaction with human subjects in vulnerable groups per CDC recommendations, including individuals older than 60, those with underlying health conditions, and those who are immunocompromised;
4. Ensure adherence to any guidelines or restrictions specific to study sites, such as schools and programs, where research participants are located;
5. Carefully consider how, in addition to any physical health risks, this unprecedented set of circumstances may present additional emotional, social, and economic risks to human subjects;
6. Please stay alert to CDC and Fresno County Department of Public Health guidance involving social interaction, and consider how this would potentially alter the risk level of your study procedures for both research participants and study personnel.

The University CPHS will continue normal review procedures and operations and prioritize expedient review of any urgent study modifications in light of these recommendations. Any unanticipated problems or adverse events related to COVID-19 exposure as part of previously approved study protocols should be reported to the University CPHS immediately per the instructions in approval and renewal notifications.

Please let me know if we can be of any assistance as you evaluate how to proceed with research in ways that best protect the health, well-being, and rights of research participants. If you have any questions or concerns about existing or new protocols, please email me directly at: jrandles@csufresno.edu.

Sincerely,
Dr. Jennifer Randles
Chair, University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects