

RETURN TO WORK PLAN FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICS, ENGINEERING PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY

Version: 1.1, June 10, 2020

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1. Introduction

As the Covid-19 crisis slowly eases, the complete ban on research at Queen's University is being changed to a partial ban prior to it being completely lifted. Queen's has taken a phased-in approach to restoring research activities on campus and at other facilities affiliated with the university. This document delineates instructions and recommendations as to how the department can return to research in a safe manner during such a partial ban. This document is based on a similar plan developed by the Chemistry department and the latest updates by the VPR and the ADR (FAS). For up-to-date university research policies, please visit the [VP Research COVID-19 page](#).

2. Phased Return to Research

Phase 1 of the return to research plan is coming to an end. Phase 1 was intended to be short-term in nature and focused on putting in place the structures and supports needed to conduct research safely in accordance with laws and public health guideline. On June 5, 2020, Queen's will move to Phase 2, which focuses on expanding access to on-campus research resources. Phase 2 delegates decisions regarding access to the Faculties in coordination with the recently formed Campus Operations Group chaired by the Vice-Principal (Finance and Administration). In FAS, ADR (Associate Dean Research) Nick Mosey intends to delegate the approval process to the Departments with some oversight by the Faculty.

Important: requests for on-site access are to be done so judiciously and that undertaking research remotely is still the preferred option. On-site access is challenging to facilitate and requires significant resources of building managers and custodial staff. This is not the process to gain access to your office or meet with students; those details will come as a broader reopening of the campus is planned.

2.1 Process for PIs:

1. Principal Investigators/faculty members must prepare and sign the *Physics Department Request to Undertake Research On-Site Form*.
2. The *Request Form* is submitted to Julie McDonald – jmm27@queensu.ca
3. The request is reviewed by the Physics Research and Safety Group. The group currently has the following members: Julie McDonald, Robert Knobel, Mark Chen, Laura Fissel, James Fraser, Jun Gao, Patrick Given, Charles Hearn, and Benjamin Tam.
4. The decision, along with any feedback and suggestions are returned to the PI within a week.
5. Applications that are approved will be ensured that necessary university services (security, custodial services, etc.) know that the space is being used.

Phase 2 will be characterized by allowing research activities falling within 'Priority Timelines 1 and 2' to take place on campus. Priority Timeline 1 items are those for which the inability to access the on-campus resources would lead to a significant negative consequence by August 31, 2020 and constitute:

1. Research related to SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19 that cannot be undertaken remotely;
2. Long running research/field research in which a serious loss of research material, data, or equipment could occur if the work was disrupted, is at a critical stage or close to an end-point;
3. On-going studies that require regular care, conditioning or inspections (e.g., maintenance of cells, animals, breeding colonies, or tissues);
4. Equipment which must be inspected regularly;
5. Research specifically to address reviewer requirements to complete manuscripts in revision;
6. Research required to meet a contract deadline which cannot be renegotiated;

7. Research that, if paused, would negatively impact the ability of a graduate student to complete program requirements within the next three months and requires minimal on-site work/time to complete;
8. Highly unique research circumstances.

Priority Timeline 2 items are those for which the inability to access the on-campus resources would lead to a significant negative consequence by December 31, 2020 and constitute:

1. Research that, if paused, would negatively impact the ability of a student to complete program requirements by December 31, 2020.
2. Research that is needed to address critical career and grant applications prior to Dec 31, 2020.

Only requests consistent with the activities included in Priority Timelines 1 and 2 are permitted. Those aligned with Priority Timeline 1 take precedence.

It is stressed that research that can be done remotely is not included in these lists. This restriction precludes faculty, PDFs, graduate students and other research personnel from accessing their offices for general research purposes. That type of work is included in Priority Timeline 3.

2.2 Mandatory pre-approval preparations for PIs.

In filling out the Request to Undertake Research On-Site, some necessary preparations are required to permit a safe return to work. It is critical that people adhere to the guidelines that describe various safety protocols. Flexibility is a key feature to the following process, since it is envisioned that the situation on the ground could very well change based on the external situation. The following are representative of the things that should be addressed.

1. Supervisors should inspect their own labs for safety and maintenance deficiencies before they reopen their labs. Please get one-time permission from the department for this access before blanket approval is given.
2. Review all NEW departmental protocols for accessing shared instrumentation, the store, the liquid nitrogen refilling station, the machine shop and the communal areas.
3. **Each faculty member should develop an individual work plan that details the safe operation of their groups within the space.** This would consider the following:
 - a. Maximum and minimum number of people working at any one time. Detail any shift like situations and how the process would be managed.
 - b. Keep track and record all lab activities and report to Julie McDonald on a weekly basis.
 - c. Protocols for using communal equipment in the laboratory.
 - d. Protocols for researchers working alone.
 - e. Coordinate with other groups also using the space, particularly for shared laboratories to avoid crowding.
 - f. Provide an exit plan in the case that the group has to cease research rapidly because of a change in the criteria for work.
 - g. Adhere to the current university guidance in regard to self-monitoring and active monitoring of research personnel.
 - h. Adhere to the current university guideline in reporting any confirmed positive COVID-19 case.
4. The Department Chair, with the assistance of members of the Research and Safety Committee, will review all of the plans to ensure the plan is robust and safe.

In addition to ensuring the work is aligned with these criteria, faculty requesting approval to conduct on-campus research should ensure they have a clear plan for meeting all public health regulations. At present, key public health guidelines include:

- where possible, all work that can be completed remotely should be done as such (this is echoed in the priority timelines).
- practice physical distancing; ensure all workers can be spaced 2 m (6 ft) apart and continue virtual meetings.
- frequent hand hygiene, cleaning of high touch surfaces as per Ministry guidelines, encouraging the use of masks if physical distancing is not possible. Please note the masks mentioned here are cloth masks unless the laboratory requires other PPE to undertake the research safely.
- use passive and active screening; this includes self and peer monitoring.
- limit interacting groups to cohorts of 5 people; discourage intermixing between cohorts.
- strongly encourage all research personnel to have up to date routine immunizations including influenza.

Refer to Section 3 for additional recommendations and guidelines.

2.3 Process for the Department

1. The Department Head consults with faculty members in their unit to assess the extent to which on-campus access permitted under Priority Timelines 1 and 2 is required within their unit.
Status: a Research Re-start Survey had been sent to all departmental personnel on May 28 and the replies received on May 31.
2. The Department Head and/or a department research committee, in consultation with members of the Department, the ADR, the representative from the VPR's office conducting space surveys, and Environmental Health and Safety, develops a plan to provide access for researchers that satisfies the conditions outlined in section 2.3.
3. Status: a PLAN FOR PARTIAL RE-OPENING AND ON-SITE RESEARCH OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICS (This document) has been developed.
4. The Department Head submits the plan to the ADR. The ADR reviews the plan and recommends changes if necessary.
5. Once the Department's plan is approved by the ADR, the Department approves applications to access their unit according to that plan.
6. On a weekly basis, the Department reports to the ADR any new access locations, approvals made according to the approved plan and the locations approved.
7. On a weekly basis, the Department collects a list of individuals who have accessed spaces in the unit and keeps it in a secure location.
8. Recognizing that plans may be insufficient to capture all scenarios that may arise, the units will consult with the ADR when they are unsure how to make a decision on an application according to their existing plan and, if necessary, determine how the plan can be modified.

2.4 Requirements for the Department

The plans units use to make decisions regarding access to on-campus research spaces during Phase 2 are subject to multiple conditions. The following list enumerates key conditions that all plans must meet. Note that these requirements are subject to change.

1. A form to be used within the unit to collect information needed to assess whether access should be permitted according to (i) the list of activities permitted under Priority Timelines 1 and 2 and (ii) the unit's ability to meet public health requirements; particularly those related to capacity.

Status: The *Physics Department Request to Undertake Research On-Site Form* has been developed.

2. A description of the process that will be used to review requests for accessing space. This process should be fair and transparent to all those in the unit.

Status: The process is detailed in Section 2.1.

3. A description of the capacities of different spaces in the unit along with the identification of any 'pinch points' such as a single door used to enter the space.

Status: Building plan with room capacity and traffic pinch points is attached.

4. Plans for managing the movement of people through the space to meet capacity limitations, avoid lineups at pinch points, etc. These plans may include having personnel arrive at different times to avoid lineups at doors or implementing one-way halls and stairwells. Please indicate if assistance is needed to develop and implement these plans.

5. Plans for meeting public health requirements unrelated to the movement of people. These requirements include meeting physical distancing guidelines, the use of appropriate personal protective equipment, disinfecting surfaces, etc.

Status: The plans for meeting PH requirements are described in Section 3

6. The ADR will provide a standardized spreadsheet that must be used to collect contact-tracing information. The spreadsheet containing information for all individuals who entered a unit's space during the previous week must be kept by the department. Units must indicate how they will collect this information in a reliable manner.

Status: procedures for collecting contact-tracing information has been developed.

7. Contact information for the Unit Head/Director and Manager. This information will be used in the event of an emergency or if concerns arise.

Status: contact information is shown on the cover page.

3. Recommendations

3.1 General Recommendations

- **The supervisor should check in with your team daily to actively monitor the health of the research personnel and report any issue. Detailed procedures and contacts can be found [here](#).**
- Maintain a minimum of 2 m (6 ft) distance between ALL individuals at all times.
- The return to work in Stirling Hall is on a voluntary basis and it should be clear that no one is required to return to work until the department is completely opened. **No penalties should be assessed against anyone for declining to enter the building to continue on-site experimental work.**

- It is recommended that a person that does not feel comfortable returning to work, continue to work remotely.
- Anyone who is sick or is awaiting results from a COVID-19 test should not attempt to enter Stirling Hall under any and all circumstances.
- If you become unwell during the working day, please leave Stirling Hall. If you notice a colleague appearing unwell, encourage them to go home and inform your direct supervisor.
- **If you test positive for COVID-19** or have any other reason to believe you have been infected, please inform the department chair via knobel@queensu.ca and let them know immediately who you have been in contact with and where you have been working. The department will contact Dan Langham, Director Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) dan.langham@queensu.ca, for further instructions. No further action is to be taken without instructions from EH&S and all efforts must be taken to protect the privacy of the infected individual.
- Anyone who is in a high risk category (elderly, immuno-compromised, suffering from significant ailment, asthmatic, or has a respiratory ailment) or is living with someone in a high risk category should stay away from Stirling Hall.
- **Before coming to Stirling Hall, everyone should take the Ontario Government's self-assessment online test.** If the assessment indicates that you are in an at-risk group, you should self-isolate, or you should seek medical care, then you should not attempt to enter Stirling Hall. <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/#q0>
- Medical masks (not face-shields) should be worn in the building whenever 2 m of interpersonal separation cannot be maintained. Do not wear them all the time; as soon as it becomes damp it is no longer effective. Science Stores will be carrying masks as a regular item during the time of the partial shutdown.
- Wearing gloves (outside of the lab) is not recommended by Public Health and does not add significant protection. When people wear gloves all the time they tend to get so used to wearing the gloves that they touch their faces with the gloves as if they were not wearing them. Microorganisms on our hands can multiply to unnatural levels when we wear gloves for extended periods. It is also common for people to contaminate themselves when removing gloves.
- Do not sneeze or cough into your hands. Sneeze or cough into your sleeve at the inside of your elbow.
- Do not touch your face. Wash your hands immediately afterwards if you have touched your face.
- Surfaces that are frequently touched by more than one person, such as doorknobs, railings, elevator buttons, floor phones, lab phones, and automatic-door-opener buttons, must be disinfected frequently. Those in common areas are the responsibility of the building manager or their delegate. Those in laboratories and offices are the responsibility of the occupants of those rooms. REMEMBER: Never trust a surface you touch, irrespective of when it may have been cleaned.
- *Physical distancing* of at least 2 m (6 ft) must be practiced in stairwells, hallways, entryways, shipping/receiving areas, and other common areas of Stirling Hall. If you meet someone in a stairwell, the person closest to a door should go to the door to allow the other person to pass. Wear a mask in common areas and always assess whether you can pass someone safely.
- Limit the number of people in an elevator to one. If someone is already on the elevator, you will need to wait until it is vacant.
- Meetings should continue to be held electronically rather than in person.
- Visitors and the public should not be brought into Stirling Hall until the partial ban is lifted, except with authorization from the department chair.
- Washing hands frequently with soap and water is essential to lowering the risk of transmission. Everyone should wash their hands as soon as they enter the building. Before leaving the lab, every

person should wash their hands, even if they are heading to a washroom. Wash your hands after removing gloves.

- Before entering a washroom, knock, open the door (without touching the handle), and call out to see if anyone is there. If the washroom is occupied, exit immediately.
- After using a washroom, every person should wash their hands with soap for at least 20 seconds and then protect their hands with a paper towel before touching the doorknob as they exit the washroom. See photo.
- All people with leadership roles (department head, main office staff, committee chairs, supervisors, facility managers) need to have a designated replacement in case they become sick.



3.2 Research Labs and Research Staff

- Normal PPE (personal protective equipment) rules still apply.
- Don't share masks, goggles, face shields, or other PPE with other people. Don't use PPE that others have used.
- The number of people in a lab or other research area should never exceed the maximum occupation limit allowed. Supervisors should create schedules that allow a subset of their research group to work without violating these restrictions. If a room is shared between two or more supervisors, those supervisors should develop the schedule together.
- At the start of each shift, staff and students working in a lab should sanitize all surfaces frequently touched by more than one person, such as doorknobs, lab phones, light switches and faucet taps must be disinfected frequently.
- Supervisors are encouraged to prioritize lab time for student researchers who are about to finish their degrees or about to finish a manuscript.
- Normal safety rules still apply. Do not allow the focus on Covid-19 to distract you from practicing normal safety protocols.

3.3 Administration and Administrative Staff

- Administrative departmental staff will continue to work remotely unless there is a need for essential work to be completed in the Main Office. Administrative staff will be available by email and virtual meetings during regular work hours (Monday-Friday, 8:30am - 4:00pm). Staff required to return to in-person work will be determined on a case-by-case basis and in accordance with Public Health recommendations.
- When administrative staff need to use space in the building, office surfaces that are frequently touched by more than one person, such as doorknobs, photocopy machines, lab phones, light switches and faucet taps must be disinfected frequently (several times per day). This is the responsibility of the managers of those rooms.

3.4 Teaching Labs, Teaching Staff, and Facilities Managers & Staff

- Normal PPE (personal protective equipment) rules still apply.
- Don't share masks, goggles, face shields, or other PPE with other people. Don't use PPE that others have used.
- Facilities that are frequented by multiple users, such as NMR workstations, need to be sanitized frequently. A protective plastic cover on computer keyboards may make it easier for the surface to be sanitized without harming the electronics.

- Facilities managers should evaluate the best way to support research activities while maintaining interpersonal separation and minimizing risk of transmission and risk to themselves or users. It is expected that service availability will be reduced compared to business-as-usual. Restrictions may include a limit on the number of people in the room at one time, requirements for wearing or not wearing gloves, making appointments, or even forbidding users from entering the room (i.e. just dropping off samples).
- Users should understand that services will remain at reduced availability for some time, plan accordingly, and be patient. Facilities managers are encouraged to communicate with users to manage expectations and set realistic timelines for requests.
- Surfaces that are frequently touched by more than one person, such as doorknobs, lab phones, light switches and faucet taps must be disinfected frequently (several times per day). This is the responsibility of the managers of those rooms. **DO NOT** use a flammable disinfectant or sanitizer on any electrical device such as elevator buttons or light switches, as the vapours may ignite.

4.0 Accessing Stirling Hall

Once approvals have been given, and a proper plan is in place, all approved users of Stirling Hall should follow the following procedures when accessing the building:

1. Determine whether you need to use Stirling Hall for the purpose. Work that can be done remotely should still be done away from campus.
2. Take training on how to properly work on campus during this time of physical distancing. In Physics, we are using the training documents from Chemistry, available [here](#).
3. Determine whether you are comfortable coming to Stirling Hall. No one is forced to work on campus, and you don't have to disclose why to your supervisor.
4. Indicate that you agree to abide by the rules laid out in this document, by filling out [this form](#).
5. Before coming to Stirling Hall, everyone should take the Ontario Government's self-assessment online test. If the assessment indicates that you are in an at-risk group, you should self-isolate, or you should seek medical care, then you should not attempt to enter Stirling Hall. <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/self-assessment/#q0>
6. When you arrive at Stirling, follow the signage posted for one-direction hallways, occupancy of rooms, and access to bathrooms.
7. Use the building the minimum needed to complete your tasks.
8. When you are done, clean your workspaces so the next user is protected
9. Fill out the usage tracking form, available [here](#). This form allows us to track possible contacts should someone become infected.

Appendices in separate documents:

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