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The COVID-19 situation is rapidly evolving around the world. Queen's University administrators as well as our community partners are actively monitoring the situation. Although at the present time there are no active cases within our community and KFL&A Public Health continues to advise that the risk to our community remains low, our primary concern is the health and wellbeing of our faculty, research staff, students, and research participants.

If faculty, research staff, or students are feeling unwell, they should be staying home and avoiding contact with other individuals until symptoms are gone.

For more information on the evolving situation please consult the Queen's University COVID-19 website.

For ongoing research that is occurring within the community (e.g. community and home-based interventions, interviews, focus groups, etc.) there are currently no restrictions on enrollment of new participants. We are however requesting that researchers consider whether their active research protocols can be modified or delayed to limit personal contact. We do recommend postponing studies that cannot afford interruptions given the dynamic nature of the current situation.

For ongoing research protocols, we do recommend that researchers contact their participants to ensure that they are not showing any clinical symptoms of COVID-19. If they are, the interaction should be rescheduled when signs have resolved.

Consideration should be given to whether in-person interactions can be reduced in frequency or be replaced entirely by virtual interactions while maintaining the protocol's scientific validity. Revised participant consent or consent addendums may be required (e.g., to update privacy considerations with use of different communication channels), but these communication changes do not need to be approved by GREB prior to implementation. Please note this is not a blanket approval for protocol changes. This correspondence applies only to changes made in response to COVID-19 precautions.

While guidelines and regulations (TCPS2, FDA), require review and approval of research protocol modifications prior to implementation, an exception can be made where the change is necessary to reduce an immediate risk to participant(s) (TCPS2 Article 6.15 and 21 CFR 56.108(a)(4)). Such changes may be implemented immediately, however, where possible, the notification to GREB should be submitted via an amendment prior to implementing the changes. When submission to GREB is not possible prior to implementation, they must be reported to GREB as soon as feasible per GREB SOP 405 – Amendments to Cleared GREB Applications.

It should be noted that Ethics oversight is the responsibility of the Researcher if they are introducing additional risks or making urgent changes prior to formal GREB approval.

This change to the GREB process will be in place until further notice.

If you have any questions / concerns, please contact either Jennifer Couture, Manager, Research Ethics Compliance or Crystal McCracken, Ethics Compliance Advisor.

Sincerely,

Andrew Winterborn, DVM DACLAM