

UTIA COVID-19 Guidelines and Procedures

Updated March 23, 2020

UTIA is committed to taking all reasonable steps to minimize exposure and reduce the risk of transmission of the coronavirus through social distancing, personal hygiene, and effective workforce strategies. With this in mind, we are adopting the following procedures to guide us in the coming months. These procedures and guidelines are to be implemented immediately.

CLASSES

Didactic classes for both the Herbert College of Agriculture and the College of Veterinary (CVM) Medicine will be converted to online delivery beginning March 23, including fourth year veterinary students curriculum and training to the greatest extent possible. Provisions for online instruction will be made for all faculty and students. Creative approaches to fulfilling laboratory and experiential learning will be developed.

TRAVEL

Effective March 9, we have implemented a restriction on non-essential domestic and international travel. We are encouraging everyone to identify alternative approaches to travel out of state, especially online engagement. With many universities announcing similar travel restrictions, it is likely that out-of-state meetings, events, and conferences will be cancelled, rescheduled or offered in a different format.

Travel which may be deemed as essential could include travel that is absolutely necessary to preserve the safety of students, faculty and staff, the safety of a research subject, or a research, education or Extension activity that cannot be postponed without causing serious harm or consequences. Requests for exceptions will be handled on a case-by-case basis by our senior leadership team. Employees in counties that border another state are authorized to travel up to 50 miles across the state line without out-of-state approval.

Travel in individual vehicles is strongly recommended over mass-transit and extra precautions should be taken to reduce exposure during stops. These precautions include washing hands, the use of hand sanitizer, and only ordering food for take-out. Avoid any congregation of people.

Employees, students, and guests/visitors must self-quarantine for 14 days if they return from travel out of the country or from having been on a cruise. If they exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 infection they must self-isolate.

All UTIA employees should self-quarantine if they return from out of state travel, either university-related or personal. Details must be worked out with direct supervisors who will consider working remotely and/or leave in response to employees returning from travel, or other approaches to cover the absence from the office. If telecommuting is not possible, paid administrative leave of up to 10 working days may be available limited to the employee's regular wages without overtime.

UTIA units may adopt more restrictive requirements for both travel and return from travel to ensure the safety of students, employees and stakeholders based on those specific work environments.

MEETINGS

All face-to-face meetings, events, and activities organized by UTIA which are open to the public must be conducted using distance technology or rescheduled through April 30, 2020. Meetings of faculty and staff that involve 10 individuals or less may continue, but should also be conducted using online media whenever possible. Face-to-face meetings should be conducted following recommendations for social interactions which can be found on our website at utia.tennessee.edu/coronavirus.

FACILITIES

Access to UTIA buildings will be restricted to only employees and students. The UT Gardens and outdoor facilities at Research and Education Centers will remain accessible and research work will continue with strict adherence to social distancing. External groups will not be penalized if they cancel or reschedule their meetings or events. Extra care will be devoted to cleaning and sanitizing facilities and providing hand sanitizing material at all locations.

DAILY OPERATIONS

It is critical that any employee who is sick remain at home and self-isolate. Any student or employee who tests positive for COVID-19 must contact their supervisor and inform the University immediately. To protect individuals' private health information, the identities of faculty, staff, or students diagnosed with COVID-19 will not be released by the University. Employees may be eligible for two weeks of paid administrative leave (maximum of 10 working days) if circumstances require them to be away from work, such as child care due to school closures, elder care responsibilities, or serious chronic medical conditions that place them at high risk. These employees must seek approval for administrative leave from their supervisor.

To help minimize exposure at work, supervisors are asked to work with all employees to identify remote working opportunities, flexible scheduling, or other creative approaches to reduce the risk of exposure while ensuring that critical responsibilities are carried out. Employees scheduled to attend external meetings or events should discuss their participation with their direct supervisor and make an informed decision about participation.

Student and other part-time hourly workers should be provided opportunities for continued employment at their current appointment levels. These tasks may need to differ from their normal duties based on their location and operational needs. Our goal is to continue to provide productive employment and earnings to these workers so that they are not disadvantaged by this outbreak. Student and temporary workers are not eligible for paid administrative leave. Student and temporary workers who decline alternate work assignments will be unpaid until their normal responsibilities resume.

Costs associated with travel cancellations, meetings rescheduled, hourly worker pay, and added facilities expenses will be tracked by each department, center, or office.

RESEARCH

Research projects will continue. In the unlikely event of the closure of a research facility, plans should be developed to provide ongoing care for animals and plants. Arrangements may also be needed to accommodate student-led research projects to ensure progression towards degree completion. Laboratory managers must recognize that there may be fewer individuals in each facility, and it is unsafe for any individuals to work alone in laboratory settings.