

## **UTIA COVID-19 Guidelines and Procedures**

### **Updated September 30, 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 have adopted the following procedures to guide us in the coming months. These procedures and guidelines are to be implemented immediately.

#### **TRAVEL**

As of October 1, out of state travel only requires approval by the direct supervisor and the department head of the employee. International travel is still restricted through December 31, 2020, and travel out of the country requires an exception approved by senior UTIA leadership. At this time, we are still encouraging everyone to identify alternative approaches to travel, including online engagement. The international travel restriction will be re-evaluated periodically over the next several months as conditions change, and if possible, the restriction may be lifted sooner. It is important to point out that travel reimbursements will not be allowed for international trips which have not been approved in advance of the dates of the travel. Out-of-state travel restrictions may be reinstated if CDC guidelines warrant a change. Before planning any travel, whether work related or personal, travelers should visit the CDC's webpage for safe travel recommendations at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/travel-during-covid19.html>

Travel in individual vehicles is strongly recommended over mass-transit. Instructors and students traveling for educational purposes should utilize UT Fleet Services vehicles whenever possible, and follow capacity and safety guidelines published by [UT Fleet Services](#). Extra precautions should be taken to reduce exposure during stops. These precautions include wearing a face mask, washing hands, the use of hand sanitizer, and only ordering food for take-out. Avoid any congregation of people other than those intended as part of the purpose of the travel (e.g., judging teams). Gatherings of multiple people shall abide by University guidelines; out-of-state travel shall abide by guidelines in effect within the state and locale in which travel is occurring.

International travel which may be deemed as essential could include that which 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.

- [Faculty/staff international travel exception form](#)
- [Student international travel exception form](#)

All international travel exception requests should be submitted and approved prior to committing financial resources to registration fees, lodging, or other travel-related expenses. Airline tickets should be booked only after receiving travel approval and no more than four weeks in advance for any international meetings scheduled.

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.

UTIA employees, including graduate and undergraduate students, shall discuss their reentry plans to the workplace with their supervisor prior to travel, for either university or personal reasons. Details must be worked out with direct supervisors, who will consider telecommuting and/or leave in response to employees returning from travel, or other approaches to cover the absence from the office. Questions to be discussed include:

1. What is the mode of travel to the destination?
2. Was the incidence of positive COVID-19 cases at the destination much higher than the number of cases in the county of the employee's office (i.e., was the destination considered to be a "hotspot" for COVID-19 cases)?
3. Does the employee's job require close direct contact with other employees upon their return?
4. What health and safety practices were practiced during the trip (face coverings, social distancing with other individuals, etc.)?
5. Did the employee participate in any high risk activities during travel? (High risk activities might include attending large gatherings and dining or drinking at indoor settings.)
6. Is it possible to telecommute upon return without adverse impacts on job requirements or performance? 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) for university-related travel.

Answers to questions such as these will help employees and supervisors make wise decisions with regard to reentry to the workplace after travel. UTIA employees are encouraged to take Annual Leave as planned. However, employees must be prepared to abide by self-quarantine guidelines if their plans include higher risk activities and the supervisor requires self-quarantining. If a discussion about returning to the workplace following travel does not lead to a clear, mutually agreed upon plan, the supervisor should contact their Dean's Office and/or Human Resources staff for assistance in finalizing a plan. 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. Currently, domestic travel is not restricted, but domestic travelers should still adhere to the safety measures described above.

## MEETINGS

All face-to-face meetings, events, and activities organized by UTIA which are open to the public must be conducted consistent with guidance from the Tennessee Pledge and the CDC as described in the guide at <https://www.utk.edu/coronavirus/guides/hosting-campus-events-and-visitors>. Meetings may be conducted that include up to 50 participants, but provisions must be in place for sanitation, health screening, face coverings, social distancing, etc. as described in the guide. Requests for exceptions to conduct meetings with more than 50 participants must be submitted to the appropriate Dean's Office for the proposed event.

As many businesses, organizations, and agencies re-open throughout the state, employees may be invited to attend or participate in in-state face to face meetings, activities, and events. Before deciding to participate, faculty and staff should consider the following questions and discuss attendance with their supervisor:

1. Does the individual want to attend and feel safe doing so?
2. How large is the group and how large is the venue?
3. Are they putting any others (co-workers, family members) at risk if they go?
4. Are there measures in place at the venue to limit exposure to the coronavirus (social distancing, masks, sanitizers, etc.) consistent with CDC guidelines?
5. Has the individual developed plans to self-quarantine for 14 days if one or more meeting participants test positive for COVID-19 after the meeting?
6. In what capacity is the individual participating – as a presenter or panel member, or as an attendee? If an attendee, what is the anticipated knowledge gain or contribution to the discussion, and how critical is that knowledge or contribution to the Institute's mission?
7. Is there an option to participate remotely, and if so, why is physical attendance being considered?

Decisions about participating in such meetings should be made by supervisors in advance of attendance based on answers to these and other relevant questions.

## FACILITIES

Access to UTIA buildings will be restricted to only employees and students. Access for visitors attending UT sponsored events with less than 50 in a group must be pre-arranged. The UT Gardens and outdoor facilities at AgResearch 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 who are unable to work or work remotely due to a positive diagnosis, required quarantine, or self-isolation, or need to provide care for another due to COVID-19, may be eligible for paid sick leave or the recently expanded FMLA. Additional information regarding both programs may be found on the UTIA COVID-19 web page and employees should work with their unit HR partner to discuss eligibility. Paid administrative leave (maximum of 10 working days) may still be considered if the new Department of Labor offerings do not apply but must be approved by the employee's 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.

## **RESEARCH**

Critical 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. Additional guidance for critical and essential research projects will be provided by the Emergency Operations Center.