



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
Faculty of Health Sciences
Human Research Ethics Committee



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Dear Heads of Departments, Department Research Committees, Researchers and Members of the Research Community

COVID-19: FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH STUDIES AND RESEARCH SITES INVOLVING HUMANS

We are anticipating community spread in South Africa. Therefore, all research activities where people are brought together for research purposes, where research participants and research staff and students are placed at risk by virtue of the nature of data collection, or where specimen collection poses transmission risk should be urgently reviewed to determine the risk for COVID-19 transmission. Our duty is to ensure the protection of UCT staff and students; as well as reducing the risk of transmission.

In line with recommendations to practice social distancing, we want to minimise the risk of transmission at research sites and in the context of research studies involving human participants.

Over the next week, we recommend each research study or study site develop a plan to de-escalate or suspend research activities. Limiting infections and protecting research participants and research staff and students should be the priority.

Therefore, the HREC recommendations are as follows:

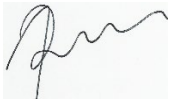
1. Limiting infections and protecting research participants and research staff and students should be the priority.
2. All non-therapeutic research involving human participants should be stopped. Exceptional reasons for research to continue can be discussed with the HREC.
3. For therapeutic research and clinical research trials:
 - a. All therapeutic research and clinical research trials should be placed on hold and research activities should be suspended where possible.
 - b. Whenever possible, telephonic visits or follow-up should occur.
 - c. Principal investigators and study sites should implement measures to ensure that there is no interruption of required medication or monitoring of adverse events.
 - d. Only critical study visits where benefits significantly outweigh the potential harm of COVID-19 infection take place going forward. Study visits for critical medication or monitoring purposes should continue in consultation with the HREC.
 - e. New enrolments to studies should be suspended. Potential exceptions to this recommendation can be discussed with HREC.
4. Recommendations regarding hand hygiene, cough etiquette and social distancing should be implemented immediately at study sites.

5. Researchers and study sites should develop a 'in the time of COVID-19' template register in case retrospective contact tracing becomes necessary.
6. Should any research staff, students or participants develop signs or symptoms suggestive of COVID-19, please call the National Coronavirus Hotline (0800 029 999), the Provincial hotline (021 928 4102), or WhatsApp "Hi" to 060 012 3456.

All precautions to prevent transmission and reduce risk need to be urgently implemented.

The HREC will continue to function administratively, as well as the reviewing of new submissions.

Yours sincerely



PROFESSOR M BLOCKMAN
CHAIRPERSON, FHS HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE