



March 13, 2020

FAQs for SDSU Researchers

Q: I am feeling sick, but have some important things that I need to take care of for my research project. What should I do?

Before you are sick, identify a [research contingency plan](#).

If you're not feeling well, you should stay home and follow the university guidelines about contacting your healthcare provider. It is a good idea to develop contingency plans if you cannot come in to take care of an ongoing research project. For example, discuss shared work responsibilities so that others could complete a critical step, put your samples in a refrigerator, or an alternative way of ensuring that you won't lose important data. If you expect to be quarantined or gone for an extended period, you might plan alternative work that you could do at home if possible and appropriate. Faculty should develop a comprehensive understanding of on-going activities by all researchers in their group, including undergraduates, graduate students, postdocs, and technicians, to ensure that urgent tasks can be completed in case of unexpected illnesses.

Q: How can I ensure my research lab is supervised if I am quarantined?

Whenever a Principal Investigator (PI) will be absent from their unit due to travel or an unexpected illness, a member of the unit (lead technician, postdoctoral researcher, or graduate student) should be assigned the responsibility of communicating with the PI as needed, responding to requests from the university and research foundation, and overseeing compliance responsibilities for the lab. The name and contact information for this individual should be indicated on biosafety, animal care, or other compliance documents, updated as needed, and provided to the Division of Research Affairs (rgulizia@sdsu.edu) and the SDSU Research Foundation (mcody@sdsu.edu). Similarly, unexpected illness may result in challenges with timely grant submission, meeting requirements for grant reporting, purchasing of supplies, etc. Please consider developing a plan in writing for an alternative person to have signature authority (dollar limits may be specified) to manage grant activities for your unit. PIs should contact their research foundation grant specialist to complete a signature authority form.

Q: Is the university planning to shut down research labs?

Although the university is encouraging social distancing by canceling large events and shifting to virtual teaching for lecture classes, at this time the university is still open. Researchers can still work in their research labs, although they are encouraged to avoid large group meetings and limit close contact to reduce risk of transmission. You should consider postponing group meetings or doing them online, and encourage people to work remotely as much as possible.

Q: How can we keep our research program running when there may be limited personnel available?

1. Identify procedures and processes that require regular personnel attention (e.g. animal studies).
2. Assess and prioritize critical laboratory activities. Identify any research experiments that can be ramped down, curtailed, or delayed. Identify personnel able to safely perform essential activities.
3. Ensure that you have access to contact information for your critical staff.
4. Cross-train research staff to fill in for others who may be out sick or unable to come to work.
 - a. Ensure they have appropriate training.
 - b. Consider documenting critical step-by-step instructions.
5. Coordinate with colleagues who have similar research activities to identify ways to ensure coverage of critical activities.
6. Review contingency plans and emergency procedures with researchers and staff.
7. Maintain a sufficient inventory of critical supplies that may be impacted by global shipping delays.

Q: How can our lab make our work environment as safe as possible?

- Researchers should disinfect lab areas and touch points with 70% ethanol (e.g. doorknobs, sink handles, freezer doors, fume hood sashes, telephones).
- Consider whether work on closely spaced computers, equipment or benchtops may be dispersed to areas that are at least 6 feet apart.
- Consider alternating or staggered work schedules to meet the demands of the laboratory while limiting close contact with others.
- Identify work that can be done from home or remotely, such as data analysis.
- Avoid in-person meetings. Use remote work technologies such as Zoom conferencing.

Q: How can we ensure the safety of researchers if we have a period of reduced staffing?

Ensure individuals performing critical tasks have been adequately trained and understand whom to contact with technical or safety questions. Avoid performing high-risk procedures alone. Notify colleagues of your schedule when working alone. Have a check-in system. Ensure high-risk materials (radioactive, biohazards, chemicals) are secured.

Q: If members of my lab team have been quarantined and students are not on campus such that my scholarship will be delayed or limited, how should I communicate this to my funding agencies?

If you think it is possible that the operations of your laboratory may be disrupted by staffing or quarantine issues, you should notify any program officers who are presently funding your research and engage them in a discussion about appropriately modifying your proposed timelines for progress. Program officers are typically understanding, and in the case of this national disruption, might reasonably be expected to be even more understanding than usual. However, don't delay keeping them updated on any progress, or challenges you are experiencing related to delivery on research programs. Contact them early, and keep them regularly updated.

Q: Sometimes we find it valuable to bring people together in person to discuss research or work on a collaborative project. Can we have meetings of smaller groups to discuss research?

The State of California has ordered that “Smaller gatherings held in venues that do not allow social distancing of six feet per person should be postponed or canceled.” It may be possible to find a room large enough to provide for adequate distance between collaborators while lecture classes are curtailed on campus, but we recommend that such meetings be shifted to an online format. Zoom and other applications allow video interactions where you can share content and see each other’s faces during group discussions.

Q: We have planned for a visitor from outside the university to present a research seminar or collaborate on research projects, and their visit is scheduled for the near future. What should I do?

While the university is focused on social distancing by shifting from in-person meetings and classes to distributed or fully virtual modalities, we recommend postponing seminars and visits from colleagues and collaborators from other institutions.

Q: I know that the university is eliminating non-essential travel, but can I travel for research that is funded by an external grant?

- Following updated guidance from the CSU, all international travel and non-essential domestic travel is suspended through the end of spring semester (May 31, 2020). This includes grant-funded projects. Future travel, including summer and fall 2020, will be determined as the COVID-19 situation evolves. Researchers should contact their appropriate dean if an exception is requested or if you have questions. Exceptions for domestic travel must be approved by the dean and provost. All international travel must be approved by the dean, provost and president.
- Whenever possible, we recommend communicating with colleagues by phone or the internet (e.g., by Zoom, Facetime, or SKYPE).
- If domestic travel is essential, Faculty and Staff are required to submit [T2 forms](#) for processing of travel and insurance documents at least 30 days prior to travel. Please note: all domestic travel requests need to be vetted through the appropriate dean and provost in advance. This includes travel supported by extramural grant funding managed by the SDSU Research Foundation (SDSURF).

Q: I traveled before the Campus restriction. Will I be reimbursed?

Reimbursements for travel before March 11, 2020 will be reimbursed with the normal review processes. Please submit the signed T2 with your receipts for processing.

Q: Is there a delay in processing Travel claims?

As of today, Accounts Payable has not specified that there is a delay in processing due to the COVID-19 outbreak. However, AP has noted that as we begin the second part of the Spring 2020 semester, and begin to close out the 2019/20 FY, please expect a slight delay due to the quantity of claims received during this time period.

Q: If members of my lab team have been quarantined and students are not on campus, how can I operate my laboratory?

If you think it is possible that the operations of your laboratory may be disrupted by staffing or quarantine, you should notify any program officers and your SDSURF Grant Specialist and engage them in a discussion about appropriately modifying your proposed timelines for progress. Program

officers are typically understanding, and in the case of this national disruption, might reasonably be expected to be even more understanding than usual. However, don't delay keeping them updated on any progress, or challenges you are experiencing related to delivery on research programs. Contact them early, and keep them regularly updated.

Q: Where can I find more about how federal funding agencies are responding to challenges with timely completion of applications, reports, and delayed research due to COVID-19?

- [NIH](#)
- [NSF](#)
- [OMB](#) (Office of Management and Budget memorandum on administrative relief for agencies)
- Updates and information on the response from other agencies will be posted as it becomes available

Q: I have a grant deadline coming up, what should I do?

Plan early, complete early, submit early. Please contact your research foundation development specialist immediately if you are planning to submit a proposal before June 1st. Keep an eye on the source of the Request for Proposals, whether Grants.gov, FEDBIZOPS, or the program website. Sometimes agencies will issue additional guidance or extensions. However, you should plan to complete your application and submit early. SDSU Research Foundation is continuing operations as normal at this time and is preparing for staff to work remotely if necessary, however, staff may be impacted by personal circumstances and it is difficult to predict what technical issues may occur.

Q: I need a letter of support for my project. What should I do?

Please send your request to the appropriate party early. SDSU is not closed at this time, but responses may be delayed.

Q: Can you extend the deadline on UGP submissions?

Please contact Research Affairs to request an extension. We are honoring requests on a case-by-case basis. The appropriate contact is listed on the SDSU Infoready portal, and is Christine Cook, Research Affairs, Phone: 619-594-0905, Email: clcook@sdsu.edu