

MEMORANDUM

COVID-19 Precautions for Projects Involving Direct Interaction with Project Participants April 6, 2020

To: PHO and PHU Project Leads with active projects approved by the PHO's Ethics Review Board

**From: Nancy Ondrusek, Director, Research and Ethics Services and
Elizabeth Peter, Chair, PHO Ethics Review Board**

COVID-19 Precautions

Project Leads have a responsibility to their colleagues and project participants to take appropriate precautions to reduce the risks of exposure and transmission of COVID-19. For ongoing projects involving direct interaction with participants, appropriate precautions at this time include the following:

- Avoid direct contact with participants by delaying or modifying data collection procedures, such as conducting interviews by telephone or video conference instead of in-person.
- Individuals conducting projects related to COVID-19 should follow precautions as described in the approved protocol. Advice regarding appropriate precautions may evolve as new information about COVID-19 emerges. Please check [here](#) for current updates.

Postponements and Suspensions

- Consider postponing the initiation of projects, particularly those in which interruption or modification would be detrimental to scientific merit or integrity.
- If temporary suspension of an active project is required that will disrupt participant involvement or potentially result in harm to participants, please contact the ethics office (ethics@oahpp.ca) to discuss approaches to minimize and mitigate any harms.

Protocol Modifications

Protocol modifications may be required as a result of public health measures related to COVID-19. Submission of an [ERB Amendment Form](#) may be required if these changes impact interactions with participants, or constitute a substantive change to project design. Modifications that may require amendments are:

- Changes to method or location of primary data collection
- Revisions or addendums to consent documents
- Other changes to project design, such as sample size or participation criteria

The Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2) requires review and approval of research protocol modifications prior to implementation “except when necessary to eliminate an immediate risk(s) to the participants” (TCPS 2, [Article 6.16](#)). Where changes must be implemented immediately to eliminate risk, the ERB must be notified of the change within five business days.

Please contact ethics@oahpp.ca if you have questions or concerns.