

MEMORANDUM: Omicron Variant and Research Operations

Date: December 16, 2021

All researchers are encouraged to continue to monitor the [VPRI homepage](#) for research-related updates.

In follow-up to today's [message](#) from Professor Lori Ferris, Associate Vice-President, Research Oversight and Compliance (please see accompanying document), I am writing to update you on research operations at UTSC as we respond to the challenges posed by the Omicron variant of COVID-19.

Research-related travel

The federal government's [advisory to avoid all non-essential international travel](#) may pose issues for researchers who are planning research trips internationally or who may currently be doing research outside Canada. Please continue to stay updated on [travel information](#).

GREEN LIGHT: on-campus laboratory research

At this time there will be no changes to the operation of our on-campus laboratories. It is important that everyone continue to use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and follow all public health guidance. We will be vigilant. This position will continue to be reviewed as public health directives/guidance evolves.

Academic units in consultation with researchers (faculty and their staff, students, and PDFs) have the right to make their own decisions about continuing research on campus.

However, we encourage

- Those who can work from home to do so until January 31, 2022.
- Those who can't work from home, to be aware that [Toronto Public Health](#) requires those identified as a close contact of someone infected with the COVID-19 Omicron variant to self-isolate even if fully vaccinated. This may impact multiple research staff from the same lab, and thus require some research projects to pause or be modified on very short notice.
- Researchers to consider developing contingency plans. Researchers need to be aware of the possibilities of disruptions to research operations due to the increased virulence of this variant, and should consider contacting all members of their research team to ensure all understand the situation

ORANGE LIGHT: in-person research with all non-vulnerable populations

For all in-person research that is not with vulnerable populations and that cannot be moved virtually or paused, emergency stop and contact tracing plans must be reviewed, and researchers should continue to monitor local public health guidance, travel advisories, and the VPRI website for updates.

RED LIGHT: in-person research with vulnerable populations

All in-person research with participants who are from vulnerable populations must immediately cease until January 31, 2022. Vulnerable populations include, for example:

- the unvaccinated
- the under-vaccinated (e.g., have not had two COVID-19 vaccines)
- the immune compromised
- long-term care residents and Indigenous communities

We recognize that vulnerability is contextual, and expect all researchers to consider the situation for their respective participants.

Questions about whether your study population is vulnerable should be directed to Rachel Zand, Director, Human Research Ethics, University of Toronto (rachel.zand@utoronto.ca).

The OVPRI will continue to monitor the situation.

We will all need to continue to be flexible and agile, and be prepared to quickly stop in-person research if necessary.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to generate great uncertainty and significant challenges for the UTSC scholarly community, and we continue to respond and adapt with amazing capacity and dedication. I want to take this opportunity to express my sincere and utmost appreciation for your continued support, dedication, professionalism, and thoughtfulness. It is truly a privilege to be able to work with such an amazing group of individuals. I am certain that together we will overcome this challenge.

Should you have any questions at any time, please do not hesitate to contact me or Shaun Young at shaun.young@utoronto.ca

Yours sincerely,



Irena F. Creed, PhD, FRSC, Hon D Agr Sci
Vice-Principal Research & Innovation
Professor, Department of Physical and Environmental Sciences