

COVID-19 Undergraduate Research Guidelines

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1. Introduction and Principles

This document provides guidelines for undergraduates conducting research on the Ithaca or Geneva campuses. These guidelines will help faculty add undergraduates to their research activities. Nothing in these guidelines changes any of the prior guidance related to the research activities of faculty, graduate student, and other researchers.

The guidelines were developed based on the following principles:

- A. Cornell is one of the greatest research universities in the world and providing undergraduates with research opportunities is a top priority.
- B. All people, including undergraduate students, engaged in Cornell sponsored research in laboratory and field projects, are entitled to the same care and protection with respect to the risk of COVID-19.
- C. Undergraduate research is subject to all the COVID-19 related guidelines that apply to other research. These specific guidelines for undergraduate researchers *are in addition to* the guidelines for all research to account for the likely lack of training and inexperience with laboratory or field procedures of undergraduates.

An undergraduate research project is defined as activity conducted as part of a research or independent study course or part of a faculty member’s research project, whether the student is a paid assistant, participating for course credit, or is an unpaid volunteer. These guidelines apply to such courses and projects only.

Research projects conducted as part of a course and included in the syllabus and Project Teams are subject to teaching guidelines and are not within the scope of this document. In case of doubt about whether a particular course or project is within the scope of these guidelines, contact the Research Implementation Committee through vp_research@cornell.edu.

Many research projects can be accomplished remotely, without any need for face to face meeting between the undergraduate researchers, faculty mentors, other students, or research staff. Other projects require in-person interactions. These guidelines partition projects requiring *in-person* interactions into three broad categories according to the degree of risk of viral transmission (this refers to community spread, not virus research). The categories and requirements for each are described in section 3. In section 2, requirements for all undergraduate research are described. Appendix A provides a flow chart to help determine the viral transmission risk category of a research project.

2. Requirements for All Undergraduate Research

Certain requirements must be met to conduct undergraduate research in any risk category. These are:

1. All activities that can be conducted remotely, which do not require the presence of other people, should be conducted remotely. For example, library research involving only materials available in electronic form or research on computational methods can generally be conducted remotely.
2. Travel from the Ithaca and Geneva campuses to field locations within New York state must follow the [COVID-19 TRAVEL AND VISITOR POLICY](#). Research in the NYC and Long Island regions of New York State, by undergraduates attending the Ithaca or Geneva campuses, is not allowed.
3. During the COVID-19 pandemic, undergraduates may not access laboratories without the presence of a mentoring faculty member, lab manager, senior technician, postdoc or graduate student in the lab or a nearby area where they can be easily reached. Review the [EHS Coronavirus Guidelines](#) for laboratory safety best practices during the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. All applicable guidelines for research listed on the [Coronavirus Research Continuity](#) website must be met, *including either an addendum to the approved research reactivation plan to add undergraduate researchers or submission and approval of a new plan for the undergraduate researchers*. Any additional requirements imposed by the PI's college or equivalent academic unit must also be met.
5. These guidelines are not a substitute for any of the policies and guidelines applicable to undergraduate activities on campus. In particular, undergraduate researchers, like all other members of the Cornell community, must complete the [Daily Check](#) for each day of working on campus or in a research field location and must adhere to [EHS Mask and Face Covering](#) guidelines.
6. These guidelines are meant to address concerns about community spread of COVID-19 and are not a substitute for any of the policies and regulations that apply to research activities. It is the responsibility of faculty with undergraduate research students to understand and ensure compliance with all relevant policies and regulations.

3. Definitions of Risk Categories and additional requirements

- A. **Level 1 Transmission Risk Research:** Research in this category has the most limited degree of interaction of the undergraduate with researchers and other participants. Because of limited interpersonal contact, this category has the lowest risk of community viral transmission. The research can be conducted while everyone involved complies with the social distancing rules required for reactivating any business doing Office-Based Work¹, including wearing masks and maintaining separation of at least six feet between persons occupying the same room. The research activity may require the undergraduate researcher to be in direct unprotected contact with equipment of some kind, but the procedure cannot increase the risk of viral transmission, and the equipment must be disposable. There are no additional requirements for research meeting these Level 1 criteria.

¹ See the [Summary Guidelines for Office-Based Work](#) in NY state Phase 2 reopening.

B. **Level 2 Transmission Risk Research:** In this category, there is some risk of viral transmission that is clearly mitigated by the research procedures and protocols and there is minimal to no risk of aerosolization of virus-containing droplets. For example:

- The research or training activity requires that participants be within six feet of each other, but masks, gloves or other PPE required by the research process is worn at all times during these interactions. The duration of such activities must be minimized;
- The research activity requires the undergraduate researcher to be in direct unprotected contact with equipment of some kind, but the procedure does not increase risk of viral transmission and the equipment is sanitized according to appropriate protocols.

Undergraduate Research can be conducted in the Moderate Risk category if, in addition to meeting the requirements listed in section 2 for all undergraduate research, the research plan includes no risk for virus aerosolization and procedures are in place to minimize the risk due to inability to follow social distancing rules or contact with instruments.

C. **Level 3 Transmission Risk Research:** In this category, there is a higher risk of viral transmission or the undergraduate researcher is a person of increased risk as defined on the [CDC COVID-19 Website](#). For example, any research requiring prolonged contact between study participants and researchers without effective PPE is Level 3. An example of a person of increased risk is anyone with reduced lung function.

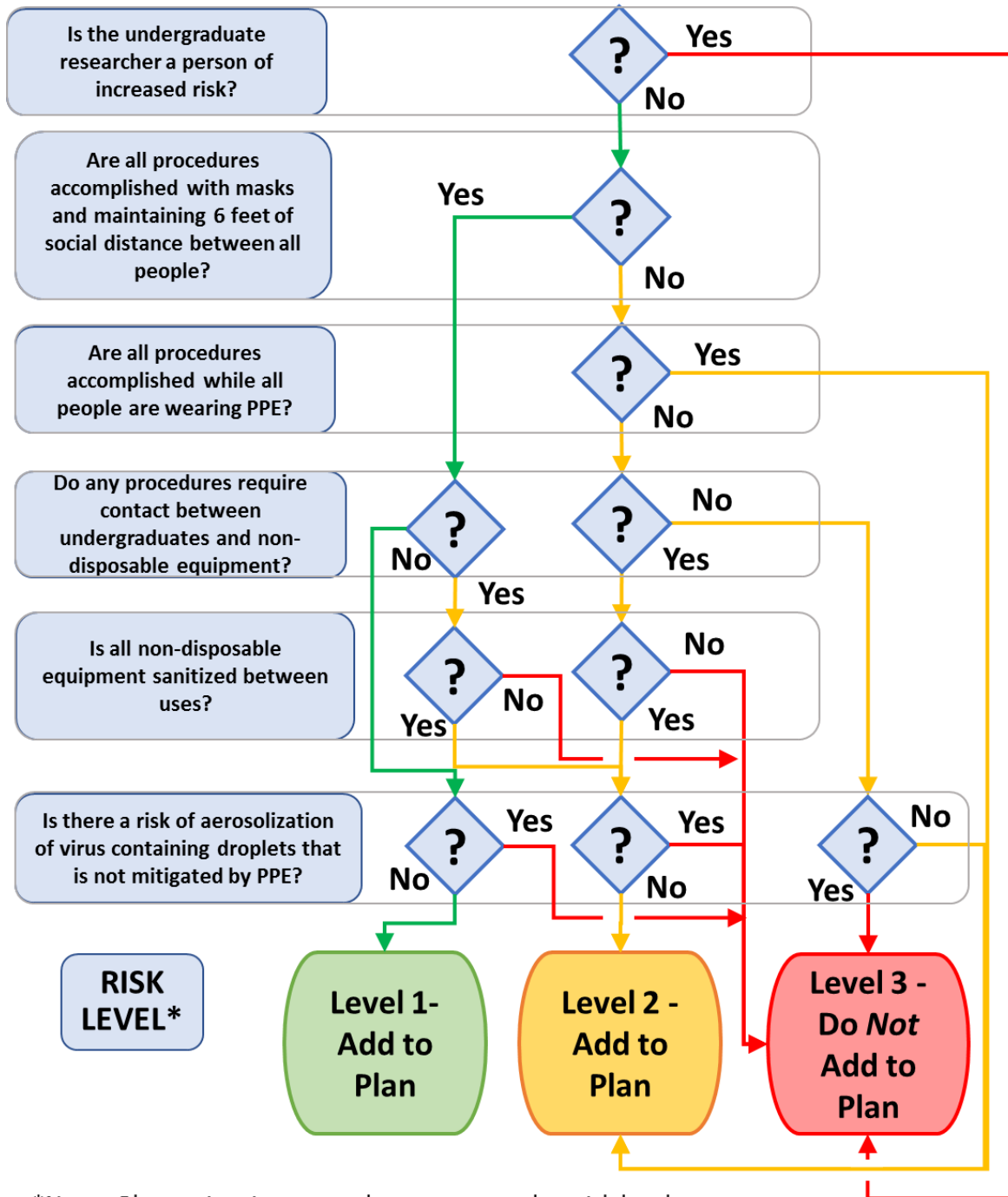
Undergraduate participation in Level 3 Research is **NOT** allowed, whether because the research will involve prolonged subject contact or because the individual undergraduate is a person with increased risk due to health conditions. (Note that unless an undergraduate volunteers information about being of increased risk, no assumptions should be made about their health status; however, it is important to be sensitive to health concerns that might be voiced by an undergraduate researcher and to ensure proper assessment is undertaken by Cornell Health if concerns are raised about the safety of an individual's participation in research activities.)

The pandemic increases the risk of any research activity. For this reason, undergraduate participation in research that inherently involves substantial risk to the researcher is also not allowed. Examples include, but are not limited to, activities that require access to a BSL3 or ABSL3 laboratory.

It is not possible to delineate all the circumstances that would cause a research plan to be High Risk. Nor is it possible to delineate all the requirements for conducting High- Risk research in these guidelines. In case of doubt, consult with the relevant Research Safety Officer from Environment, Health and Safety listed in the [EHS Organizational Chart](#).

Appendix A. Flowchart to Determine COVID-19 Risk Category of an Undergraduate Research Plan

This flowchart will help faculty decide what level of COVID-19 risk the proposed undergraduate research entails. It should be noted that this is only a general guide. Final determination will depend on the review process.



*Note: Plan review in approval process may alter risk level.