

**Fieldwork During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

**Queen’s University Belfast**

**School of Biological Sciences**

This document sets out the principles and procedures to enable the efficient execution of fieldwork associated with field and seasonally based research projects, where there is a risk of losing research opportunities for an entire year should the window of opportunity to undertake work be missed. The document also applies to industry-funded animal welfare research that is highly time sensitive and is conducted on commercial farms. The resumption of research that takes place largely in a rural and agricultural settings with minimal (or even zero) social contact should be relatively straightforward as long as the appropriate government guidelines for working outdoors are followed. This document incorporates recommendations and requirements laid down by the Northern Ireland Executive and will evolve, incorporating measures as advice changes.

When authorization has been given for this type of work to commence, a new or updated risk assessment will be carried out to ensure that all activities and behaviours consider not just the health and safety of individual field workers and the public, but also to minimize any risk to the reputation of the Researcher, School of Biological Sciences, and Queen’s University Belfast.

If any researcher presents or develops COVID-19 like symptoms the individual must remove themselves immediately from the field site and self-isolate in line with government guidelines.

University Management will promote mental health and wellbeing awareness to all staff and students during the Coronavirus outbreak and will offer whatever support they can.

Planning

* Fieldwork activities must be carefully planned and a “home to home” schedule should be in place. All projects currently have unique risk assessments, drawing on generic field working guidelines and adapted to fit each project’s specific needs. In the context of COVID-19, these risk assessments must demonstrate that researchers can depart from base, arrive on site, work and return to base with negligible risk to themselves and others.
* There must be every provision made that the minimum number of people needed to carry out the activity safely and effectively will be on site. Where tasks require more than one person to work together, teams should have fixed membership to minimize contact with different groups of people. The researcher should, where possible, ensure that any helpers are from their own household.
* Landowner permissions and any necessary permits must be secured in advance and in writing (email will suffice). A schedule of visits must be shared with the landowner and they should be notified when the researcher enters and leaves the property. Evidence of permission should be carried electronically so it can be shared by text or email, if requested by the PSNI.

PPE & hygiene

* Researchers must use the appropriate PPE including gloves. Although face coverings are not mandatory they may be used if social distancing is not always possible.
* Physical separation of all people involved, by 2 metres or more, should be maintained at all times if possible. Use of face masks should not reduce efforts to maintain distancing.
* All field equipment, gates, turnstyles, etc. must be cleaned (e.g. using disinfectant wipe) to eliminate the risk of transmission of COVID-19 between researchers and other users.
* The researchers should take frequent breaks to attend to any hygiene requirements.
* On leaving the field site, and at appropriate intervals during the field work, hands should be cleaned thoroughly. If washing is not possible without entering buildings used by others, hand sanitizer should be used. Hands must be washed thoroughly on returning from the field, whether gloves were worn or not.

Travel

* Public transport will be avoided.
* Where possible, researchers should use their own vehicle and should travel alone or with a member of their household (the appropriate business insurance must be in place). If this is not possible, and they must use a University vehicle, it must undergo rigorous cleaning procedures before and after use, ensuring all touch points have been cleaned (steering wheel, gear stick, door handles, radio, etc). Situations where a vehicle must be shared will be discussed and agreed by the PI/Supervisor.
* Travelling distance will be kept to a minimum to achieve the objectives of the field work.
* Gloves will be worn when refueling and will be disposed of appropriately, before reentering the vehicle.
* There must be evaluation of the risk and control measures relating to breakdown or accident which could impact on the Emergency Services.
* In case of an accident, procedures for vehicle recovery will be clearly displayed on the dashboard of the vehicle.

On site/ in the field

* The researcher must comply with any further measures that have been put in place by the landowner.
* The researcher should use signage on the vehicle to inform the public what work is being done and that it has been authorized by Queen’s University.
* If approached by members of the public during field work, they are to be instructed to keep at least 2 metres away and explanations should be kept as brief as possible.
* Social distancing of 2m should be maintained at all times. Where this is not possible increase the regularity of hand washing and surface cleaning and use back-to-back or side-to-side working whenever possible. The use of face coverings should be considered where social distancing is not possible. Keep the activity time involved as short as possible.
* Standard PPE required for the activity will continue to be used (see above). Increased measures will only be put in place if greater risk of transmission of Coronovirus between fieldworkers or the public is identified, either by the nature of the activity or updated information on transmission risks.
* Sharing of field equipment will be kept to a minimum. Every effort will be made to provide individuals with their own equipment. Where equipment has to be shared, all touch points will be cleaned by each user before and after use.
* There will be frequent cleaning of work areas and equipment between use, using regular cleaning products (damp cloth soaked in hot water and mild soap solution, or cleansing wipes). The system for cleaning items of equipment and for communicating that this has been done should be included in the risk assessment.
* There should be adequate disposal arrangements for used PPE and cleaning materials. Used PPE should be removed from the site in a sealed plastic bag, stored for 72 hours and disposed of in normal waste.
* If face coverings are worn the user must observe washing procedures and must avoid touching their face or face covering to prevent contamination from hands. The face covering should be replaced or washed daily. The evidence of the benefit of a face covering is weak therefore the use of face coverings is not a replacement for other ways of managing risk, such as minimizing time spent in contact, using fixed teams and increasing hand and surface washing.

Completion

* All equipment and PPE will be cleaned or disposed of safely. Any samples will be preserved or stored appropriately until they can be returned to the School of Biological Sciences.
* Cleaning products, disinfectant and disposable cloths will be provided in the vehicles to facilitate cleaning of the vehicle, before and after use. This will be the responsibility of the driver and will be checked off as part of the vehicle check.

I confirm that I have read, understand and agree to the procedures and requirements in the above document.

**Signed**: Click or tap here to enter text. **Date**: Click or tap here to enter text.