

Returning to our work stations: Stages II-IV

As with the first steps of our staggered approach to reopening the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, these subsequent stages are meant to ensure the health and safety of its employees and clients.

This document outlines the next three stages, culminating in having all our employees back to their duty stations on at a date to be determined.

This plan has been created in keeping with guidance from the Arkansas Department of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the UA Board of Trustees, along with guidance from administrators from across the Division of Agriculture. It is meant to align with the gating criteria set out by the [White House](#).

COVID-19 and its effects have evolved rapidly and our understanding of the behavior of this virus also changes rapidly. The Division's plans will align with recommendations from ADH, CDC, or any directives issued by the Arkansas governor. This plan can change with updated directives and recommendations from ADH, CDC or the Arkansas governor. The plan also takes into account individuals who require reasonable accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Administration will continually assess the situation and this plan, and its stages, and may take action to adjust the plan to fit the circumstances.

With every stage of this return-to-the-office plan, we want employees to be mindful of their health and that of their co-workers.

STAGE I

This [Stage I](#) was released May 21, 2020. (download here: https://division.uaex.edu/docs/5-28-2020-Division_of_Ag_Phase_1_Return_to_Office_.docx)

STAGE II

Employees

For Stage II, provided gating criteria are met, beginning June 22, supervisors may require certain employees to return to the office. These employees would be in addition to those employees already designated as required, who returned in Stage I. Employees can also voluntarily return to the office, upon approval, during this stage. All employees must continue to follow the [self-assessment](#) before returning to the office.

Employees who are required to return to work during this stage and who are considered [vulnerable](#) by the CDC, can contact the Office of Inclusion, Access and Compliance for further guidance if they have concerns.

Office staffing will be staggered or scheduled in shifts, as needed, and to comply with social distancing recommendations and prevent community spread by reducing the number of employees concentrated in office spaces.

Work Related Travel

No international travel. Interstate travel is upon approval of the vice president, senior associate vice presidents, or associate vice presidents. Faculty and staff may conduct in-state work-related travel. Follow CDC and ADH guidance on whether self-quarantine is required.

Please see Q&A for Personal Travel.

Supervisors

In addition to those employees who have already returned as required, supervisors may bring other employees into the office as they deem necessary and/or those that volunteer, using staggered starts or rotating shifts to ensure social distancing. Supervisors must notify facilities management when buildings will be occupied to ensure proper cleaning and disinfecting of common areas.

Workspaces

The same sanitizing, social distancing and face mask requirements set out in Stage I will continue to be valid.

Clients/Visitors

The visitor policy set out in Stage I will be valid for Stage II as well. Small-group gatherings of 10 or fewer will be allowed without requiring prior approval, provided there is adequate space to ensure social distancing. Masks will be worn.

Administration

Administration will continue to assess the situation and determine whether the organization can progress to the next stage or should regress to the previous stage.

Research Activities

For research activities, essential, critical and time sensitive research activities can be conducted in Stage II. Stage II research for on-campus faculty members corresponds to Level 3 of the campus [Research Continuity](#) plan

- a. Definitions:
 - i. Essential Research Activity: *Essential research activities include basic animal and plant care, maintenance of cell lines, and maintenance of equipment or building infrastructure that could not be shut down during a restriction on research.*
 - ii. Critical Research Activity: *Critical research activities are identified and prioritized at the Unit level, to be those activities with the greatest time and research productivity constraints. These can include but are not limited to, seasonal data collection such as field and agricultural work, experiments close to completion, or projects whose continued restriction or deferral would lead to catastrophic delay or loss of research results and subsequent success.*
 - iii. Time Sensitive Research Activity: *Time sensitive research activities are defined at the Unit level, to be those activities with elevated, but not critical, time and research productivity constraints. These can include activities for graduate students and postdoctoral associates close to completing their degree/term of appointment and research for completion of grants with nearing end dates.*

- b. For PIs with laboratories on the Fayetteville campus, specific guidance from campus administration should be incorporated into the Unit's risk assessment plan including the development of a research plan identifying tasks and key personnel, detailing specific tasks, and establishing a work schedule for key personnel.
- c. **Key Preventative Measures for Laboratory Work (Same as Stage I):**
 - Maintain a 6-foot distance from other personnel when possible.
 - Consider working in shifts to minimize personnel contact while ensuring lab/personal safety.
 - Wearing a mask is mandatory if more than one individual is present in the lab. Avoid touching your face.
 - Frequent and thorough hand washing is mandatory.
 - Maintain the buddy system with the above caveats for lab work that involves potentially hazardous materials, equipment, or conditions.
- d. **Laboratory Cleaning and Disinfection (same as Stage I):**
 - Laboratories should be disinfected daily if in use.
 - Any area that is soiled or dirty should be cleaned with detergent and water before disinfection.
 - Use appropriate disinfectant on high-contact surfaces (doorknobs, light switches, tables, chairs, pens, computer keyboards, remotes, equipment lids, doors, on/off switches, knobs, handles, sinks, benchtops/counters, desks and cabinets).
 - Consideration should be given to using plastic wrap on sensitive surfaces to disinfect. Plastic should be discarded after each use.
 - Ensure all areas are covered thoroughly with the disinfecting solution and remain wet throughout the necessary contact time (follow manufacturer recommendation). Allow items to air dry before use.
 - All sanitizing material should be disposed of once disinfection is complete and the individual performing the sanitation should wash their hands.
 - For PIs conducting critical research requiring off-site travel, continue to follow the [Best Practices for Field Research](#).

STAGE III

Employees

Stage III does not represent a mandatory return to the office for all employees. At a date to be determined, faculty and staff will return to their offices only if:

- 1) Gating criteria are met; and
- 2) Their return is guided by a unit or building plan that has been reviewed and approved by a senior associate vice president or designee.

Supervisors may consider whether there are staff with demonstrated performance who may be able to carry out their functions effectively via working remotely or on a longer-term basis (as information on coronavirus transmission continues to evolve), consistent with efficient campus operation and policies. In those instances where additional employees are returned to the workplace, supervisors should review and revise their return-to-work plans to accommodate the additional workers. **Supervisors should use or maintain staggered or rotating office staffing.** Supervisors may consider whether there are staff with demonstrated performance who

may be able to carry out their functions effectively working remotely on a longer-term basis (as information on coronavirus transmission continues to evolve), consistent with efficient campus operation and policies.

All returning employees must continue to follow the [self-assessment](#) before returning to the office.

Employees who are required to return to work during this stage and who are considered [vulnerable](#) by the CDC, can contact the Office of Inclusion, Access and Compliance for further guidance if they have concerns.

Work Related Travel

Faculty and staff may conduct interstate and in-state work-related travel.

International work-related travel is at the approval of the vice president, senior associate vice presidents, or associate vice presidents. Follow CDC and ADH guidance on whether self-quarantine is required.

Please see Q&A for Personal Travel.

Supervisors

See “Employees” above.

Workspaces

The same sanitizing, social distancing and face mask requirements set out in Stage I will continue to be valid.

Clients/Visitors

The visitor policy set out in Stage I will be valid for Stage III as well. Groups of up to 50 people may be held indoors, provided there is adequate space for social distancing. [See ADH guidance on indoor meetings](#). ADH directives also allow for [outdoor meetings of up to 50 people](#). Masks are still required.

Administration

Administration will continue to assess the situation and determine whether the organization can progress to the next stage or should regress to the previous stage.

Research Activities

All types of research activities may resume. Stage III research for on-campus faculty members corresponds to Level 3-4 of the campus [Research Continuity](#) plan

For PIs with laboratories on the Fayetteville campus, specific guidance from campus administration needs to be followed if that guidance is more restrictive than that presented here

Key Preventative Measures for Laboratory Work (New for Stage III):

- Consider working in shifts to minimize personnel contact while ensuring lab/personal safety.
- Wearing a mask is mandatory only if 6-foot distance cannot be maintained between researchers at all times.
- Frequent and thorough hand washing is highly recommended
- Maintain the buddy system with the above caveats for lab work that involves potentially hazardous materials, equipment, or condition

Laboratory Cleaning and Disinfection (New for Stage III, recommendations on disinfection practices from Stage I still apply):

- Laboratories should be cleaned and disinfected as appropriate but no less than once a week.
- For PIs conducting critical research requiring off-site travel, continue to follow the [Best Practices for Field Research](#). This document will be revised to reflect practices.

STAGE IV

At a date to be determined, our operations will be open to the public during our regular office hours.

In guidance issued May 21, 2020, for institutes of higher education, the CDC recommends continued use of key tactics of its disease mitigation strategy. These include use of masks, social distancing, handwashing, disinfection of commonly used surfaces and closing of shared spaces or limiting the number of people in the room. Until recommended otherwise by CDC, ADH or other authority, use of these tactics will be the norm. Please follow CDC and ADH guidelines.

Given the circumstances these guidelines may change.

Employees

If circumstances allow, all employees will be expected to return to their work stations on Aug. 10, unless you have been granted an ADA reasonable accommodation request, granted a formal telecommuting agreement (See [PMGS 17-03](#)), and/or been granted flextime agreement ([PMGS 08-03](#)) with your supervisor and filed it with the appropriate the department. See Q&A below.

Work Related Travel

Abide by [CDC](#), [ADH](#), [State Department](#), Division, and or Board of Trustees guidelines and cautions.

Please see Q&A for Personal Travel.

Workspaces

Abide by [CDC](#), [ADH](#), [State Department](#), Division, and or Board of Trustees guidelines and cautions.

Clients/Visitors

Abide by [CDC](#), [ADH](#), [State Department](#), Division, and or Board of Trustees guidelines and cautions.

Research Activities

All types of research activities may be pursued but precautions should be taken to ensure the safety of researchers. Stage IV research for on-campus faculty members corresponds to Level 4 of the campus [Research Continuity](#) plan

For PIs with laboratories on the Fayetteville campus, specific guidance from campus administration needs to be followed if that guidance is more restrictive than that presented here

Key Preventative Measures for Laboratory Work (New for Stage IV):

- Wearing a mask and social-distancing are recommended practices
- Frequent and thorough hand washing is highly recommended.

- Maintain the buddy system with the above caveats for lab work that involves potentially hazardous materials, equipment, or condition

Laboratory Cleaning and Disinfection (New for Stage III, recommendations on disinfection practices from Stage I still apply):

- Laboratories should be cleaned and disinfected as appropriate but no less than once a week.
- For PIs conducting critical research requiring off-site travel, continue to follow the [Best Practices for Field Research](#). This document will be revised from Stage III to reflect practices.

Questions and Answers

When will I be allowed to return to my office or duty station? Eventually, all employees will be allowed to return to work at their regular duty station. The Division has adopted a staged approach that began May 2020 with appropriate actions taken at dates to be determined for Stages III-IV. Please contact your supervisor if you would like to be considered for inclusion in the second stage.

How long will I be allowed to work from home or remotely? The length of time an employee may work remotely will depend on multiple factors, including the individual job duties, the efficient business operations of the Division of Agriculture, whether the employee is considered a vulnerable individual, etc.

What if I am concerned about contracting COVID-19 and do not want to return to my office or duty station after Stage IV?

If you are not approved to telecommute, then you can take accrued annual leave if approved by your supervisor. Concerns over contracting COVID-19 does not satisfy the requirements for FFCRA emergency sick leave or division sick leave. Once you have exhausted your annual leave or your department head determines the needs of the department require your return, you must return to your worksite. An employee may continue with precautionary measures (such as wearing a mask and social distancing) and should consult their supervisor with regards to specific concerns.

What happens if an employee has exhausted all leave and still does not want to return to their office or duty station?

Division of Agriculture policy specifies that employees absent for three or more days without approval will be considered to have abandoned their job, and their resignation tendered. As always, employees should communicate with his or her supervisor about specific concerns or unique circumstances.

What is the process for a person to be identified as a vulnerable individual?

You may contact the Office of Inclusion, Access, and Compliance.

How long will a vulnerable individual be allowed to work from home or remotely?

Vulnerable individuals will be allowed to work remotely through Stage II regardless of job duties. Beginning with Stage III, vulnerable individuals will be allowed to work remotely only if the individual job duties and efficient business operations of the university will permit such an accommodation. You should contact your supervisor and the Office of Inclusion, Access, and Compliance if you believe reasonable accommodations are necessary for your return or to complete the steps if you believe that you are a vulnerable individual.

What are the expectations if an employee is approved to work from home?

The expectations and job duties are the same as if the employee was working on campus. The employee must document timely completion of all assignments. If an employee is not able to work during a time specified in the plan, the employee must give the supervisor prior notice and submit sick or annual leave as appropriate.

What should I do if I have taken a COVID-19 test and am awaiting results?

Do not return to the worksite. Contact your supervisor.

What should I do if I test positive for COVID-19?

You should not come to work. You should notify your supervisor as soon as possible that you have tested positive for COVID-19. Decisions about self-quarantine will be guided by CDC and ADH guidance in effect at the time the supervisor is notified.

I plan to travel out of state on personal time. Can I come right back to work?

The Division of Agriculture cannot dictate what employees do on their own time. We do ask that you report any out of state travel to your direct supervisor. It is the employees' responsibility to be knowledgeable about Division of Agriculture requirements for business travel as well as state directives/guidance about hot spots and should be prepared to take action accordingly. Employees wanting to return to work after travel should consider the risks to co-workers and others. If you are deemed an on-site employee you may be required to take leave if you have to self-quarantine due to personal travel related activities.

Note: The System Division of Agriculture has suspended (as of Stage II) their requirement to self-quarantine after personal travel unless recommended by CDC or ADH, however this could be put back into place later if needed.

Do I have to take leave if I have to self-quarantine?

That depends. If you have to self-quarantine for something such as personal travel or another reason that is not covered under FFCRA or you are out of FFCRA time you may be required to take your personal leave.

Do I need to wear gloves at work?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention does not currently recommend wearing gloves in the workplace.

What if I see someone who is not meeting these guidelines?

We expect all employees adhere to the practices outlined in this return-to-work place. If you have asked the employee to comply and the employee does not, contact your supervisor. Supervisors are expected to work with the individual to find ways to ensure the behavior is not repeated.

What if someone I have been in contact is diagnosed with COVID-19?

Per current CDC guidelines, anyone who has close contact with someone having COVID-19 should stay home for 14 days **after exposure**.

SICK LEAVE Q&A

If I receive a positive test result for COVID-19, am I eligible for the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) Paid Emergency Sick Leave?

Yes, you are eligible for paid emergency sick leave under FFCRA. Contact HR.

If I receive a positive test result for COVID-19, can I use standard sick leave?

Yes, you are eligible to use accrued sick leave. You should also contact HR to see if FMLA or FFCRA might be more appropriate.

How many days must I be off work before returning to work while recovering from COVID-19? What will be required from me?

Current guidelines indicate you must be off for at least 14 days **or** until you can provide a doctor's release stating you can return to work. Employees should communicate, if possible, with their supervisors to develop a plan for return to work.

If a family member receives a positive test result for COVID-19, am I eligible for the Families First Coronavirus Response Act Paid (FFCRA) Emergency Sick Leave?

Yes, you are eligible for FFCRA if you provide healthcare for that individual.

If a family member receives a positive test result for COVID-19, am I eligible to use my regular sick leave?

Yes, you are eligible to use accrued sick leave if you provide healthcare for that individual.

How do I apply for the Paid Emergency Sick Leave?

You must contact the Human Resources office.

The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture offers all its Extension and Research programs and services without regard to race, color, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, disability, marital or veteran status, genetic information, or any other legally protected status, and is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer.

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