
COVID-19 Steps for Continuing AgResearch Facilities Operations
Updated 2/23/2021

The initial page of this report provides guidance regarding preventive practices that will be in place until further notice. For any individual using or visiting UTIA facilities that are not on the UT Knoxville campus, the progression or regression through phases of returning to preCOVID operations at AgResearch Facilities will depend on the numbers of COVID-19 cases that are active in our various counties throughout the state. AgResearch Facilities refer to all those buildings and spaces not on the Knoxville campus, as bordered between downtown Knoxville and Neyland Drive.

Additional guidelines going forward will be updated in accordance with Federal, State, local UT and UTIA guidelines as the COVID-19 environment changes.

County-specific case counts can be found at: <https://myutk.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/a4614b1566f44f559d9c5995ebe9c49d>

Telework: Employees who are at increased risk of severe clinical presentations of illness/outcome from COVID-19 (seniors or those with other concerning health conditions) should be encouraged to continue to telework. Resumption of employees into office spaces should only be done in concurrence with CDC and University of Tennessee guidelines that indicate it is safe to return to work.

In an effort to promote social distancing until the pandemic is over, allocation of employees into office spaces should be done in a manner that promotes social distancing. Where possible and when social distancing is not possible, some employees within a unit should be encouraged to telework at 2-week intervals and interchange with those on-site at work sites. Alternatively, if social distancing or telework is not possible, employees should utilize PPE or use alternate schedules to limit spread of infection.

Increased personal hygiene precautions both at home and at work: Employees are encouraged to maintain the same high level of hygiene currently being practiced until further notice both at work and home. Some recommendations below are unlikely to occur in the short term but should be considered to improve hygiene throughout the college as we move past the current pandemic.

1. All bathrooms should be upgraded to contactless soap dispensers, paper towels, water faucets, if possible. If not possible, make sure that paper towels are available to use to open doors. Trash cans should be placed near doors for towel disposal. Soap and towel dispensers should be checked and replenished daily.
2. People should be able to pass through as many doors as possible without the use of hands. The placement of paper towels in bathrooms can aid when exiting bathrooms.
3. Hand sanitizer and paper towels for opening doors should be provided in office spaces and common areas

Face coverings and personal protective equipment (PPE): Employees are required to wear facemasks and other PPE, as appropriate, when social distancing (greater than 6 ft spacing) is not possible and when interacting with a group of nine (9) or less persons regardless of spacing. Not more than nine (9) people per group until CDC guidelines change. Cloth masks should be laundered in hot water daily as recommended. Exam or surgical gloves should be used as needed in clinical and laboratory settings. Proper hand hygiene is preferred, and encouraged, over wearing disposable gloves in non-clinical/non-research settings.

Constant self-check-ins for symptoms: Employees should perform self-checks for a fever and symptoms associated with COVID-19 every day prior to arriving for work. **Please use the COVID-19 Checklist provided at the end of this plan as guidance.** Any employees/students with COVID-19 symptoms should not come into work and should report any concerns to primary care physician, their supervisor, and seek COVID-19 testing.

COVID-19 testing sites across the state can be found at: <https://www.tn.gov/health/cedep/ncov/remote-assessment-sites.html>

Please note that the average normal temperature for a person is 98.6°F (37°C) and the recommended temperature to indicate a fever is 100.4°F (38°C). However, individuals may vary slightly in their normal temperature (either slightly higher or lower) and you should determine what your normal is. An increase in 1.8°F (1°C) would indicate a significant increase in temperature. Similarly, if using a no-touch thermometer, you should determine your normal surface temperature (baseline) and monitor for increases similar to with an oral thermometer.

Current Operations of AgResearch

AgRECs, operating under CDC guidelines for social distancing, utilizing PPE, and other essential agricultural operations guidelines, have been carrying out essential operations of caring for livestock, seeding spring crops and other seasonal and essential activities (Guidance for Accessing UT AgResearch and Education Centers – Revised 4/9/2020) <https://agresearch.tennessee.edu/centers/> Some AgREC employees have been working remotely as much as practical to complete necessary and essential functions.

- AgResearch Center priorities are: 1) health and well-being of the staff, 2) care for livestock and plants grown under certain conditions (e.g., greenhouses), and 3) supporting essential/critical research.
- All UTIA AgResearch Centers are closed to all external visitors, with the exception of deliveries of packages, supplies, and janitorial services, until further notice. Website will be updated accordingly, notice will be posted as COVID-19 environment improves to allow visitors.
- Access to AgResearch Centers by faculty, students, program staff, and affiliated organizations to perform critical operations will require prior approval from the AgResearch Center director or their designee. See designated contacts at this link: <https://agresearch.tennessee.edu/centers/>
- Upon arrival to an AgResearch Center, immediately implement social distancing and sanitation practices that are suitable for the location.

- AgResearch Center directors are directed to implement staff social distancing practices immediately. This includes, but is not limited to, operating in shifts, practicing separation during breaks, implementing flexible work schedules, and employing working remotely where possible.
- Faculty should coordinate and manage graduate student and staff travel to the AgResearch Centers to ensure the most current UTIA rules and policies are followed. AgResearch Center directors should be contacted prior to travel to the AgResearch Center site to discuss planned work.
- Limit working group size to less than ten people while practicing social distancing. At the same time keep in mind that many of the activities conducted at AgResearch Centers are safer when at least two people work together. If possible, consider traveling to and from each AgResearch Center location and/or field site with a maximum of two people per vehicle utilizing PPE or in separate vehicles; vehicle surfaces should be disinfected, use of PPE, hand sanitizer, and other recommended safety practices are expected.

Although the worldwide outbreak of COVID-19 has changed the way we're doing business, the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture (UTIA) remains committed to providing Real. Life. Solutions.

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Returning to pre-pandemic operations for AgRECs does not mean returning to pre-pandemic behavior. All AgREC operations, once given approval, should continue adhering to all current CDC preventative measures such as: social distancing, wearing PPE, implementing good sanitary practices like frequent hand washing, etc. while carrying out essential operations.

In order to continue to protect the health and well-being of our staff and the general public while fulfilling our critical land-grant mission as we transition into national and state COVID-19 crisis return-to-workplace over time, watch for revised UT AgResearch adopted guidelines ([https://agresearch.tennessee.edu/centers/.](https://agresearch.tennessee.edu/centers/))

REC Visitors Guidelines:

All UTIA AgResearch Centers building spaces remain closed to external visitors, with the exception of deliveries of packages, supplies, and janitorial services, until further notice. All gardens and the arboretum remain open to visitors as long as social distancing is practiced. Please check for updates posted at the following website: <https://agresearch.tennessee.edu/>

Questionnaire on the following page

The purpose of this questionnaire is for you to self-observe your health prior to coming to work. You are expected to complete this checklist before you come to work every day. You do not have to turn this checklist in but please notify your supervisor of your results.

Be aware of COVID-19 symptoms. These symptoms are currently associated with COVID-19 infection:

- Fever, cough, and shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Chills, repeated shaking with chills, and muscle pain
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Loss of taste or smell

Check temperature. Employees are required to do self-temperature checks before coming to the workplace and to stay home if they have a fever. Normal temperature should not exceed 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit. Units are not expected to check employee temperatures.

Self-isolate. Employees in these categories, per CDC guidelines, are required to self-isolate for 10 days.

- Anyone with symptoms of possible COVID-19 infection or known to be positive with COVID-19 infection.
- Anyone who has had close contact with someone known to be diagnosed with COVID-19. Close contact means being within about six feet of a person diagnosed with COVID-19 for a prolonged period of time (that is, more than a few minutes). Close contact can occur while caring for, living with, visiting, or sharing a health care waiting area with someone who has COVID-19. Close contact also means having direct contact with secretions (typically cough and sneezes) from a person with COVID-19.
- Anyone arriving back in the U.S. after traveling in another country.
- Anyone arriving from a cruise ship (ocean or river).
- Anyone traveling from areas or cities within the U.S. where community spread of COVID-19 is ongoing. Travelers must check with state or local authorities at the starting point of their journey, along with their route, and at their planned destination to learn about local circumstances and any restrictions that may be in place.

Employees who develop any symptoms of COVID-19 during self-isolation should contact their health care provider, or if needed, their local emergency room.

Once you begin your workday, continue to observe yourself for any changes such as fever, coughing and/ or difficulty breathing.

What to do if your condition changes while at work or at home:

If you feel feverish or develop a cough or have difficulty breathing during the self-observation period, you should:

- Take your temperature and write it down: _____
- Self-isolate (6-foot distance between you and others)
- Seek advice by telephone from your healthcare provider or local health department