

ABCRC Policy for Operations Under COVID 19 Restrictions

Updated 28 April 2021 by CA Baird

Our goal is to develop a research environment that supports the safe and reasonable continuation of long term and graduate research by students, staff, and scientists. Success of our research depends on adherence to the enclosed policies. Failure to follow these policies could lead to a closure of the facility to researchers.

We will use a combination of pre-visit criteria and on-site procedures to maximize safety. These policies are intended to protect members of our research community as well as members of the local community in which the facility resides. Members of our research community will acknowledge all policies and their awareness that they have the option to opt out of the field work/living situation at any time if they have concerns about their safety or health.

In case concerns about safety cannot be resolved within a project, any member of a research team may contact the station director Cora Baird, LTER lead PI Karen McGlathery (primary contacts), or UVA Environmental Sciences Chair Howie Epstein (secondary contact) for help establishing mutually agreeable solutions.

Cora Baird (site director): coraj@virginia.edu, (757)620-7016

Karen McGlathery (LTER lead PI): kjm4k@virginia.edu, (434) 825-6273

Howie Epstein (Environmental Sciences Dept Chair): hee2b@virginia.edu, (434) 924-4308

No person may visit (or report to work at) the ABCRC while exhibiting symptoms of illness (such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath, see <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html>). Anyone with a reasonable likelihood of exposure, including air travel, is also not permitted at the lab until a 14-day self-quarantine (i.e. maintaining low risk conditions) is confirmed.

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All Visitors

All researchers requesting access to the ABCRC facilities (lab, boats, housing) must agree to do the following:

- Have low risk of exposure in the previous 14 days, including limitations on travel from their home, visits to public places, and groups >10 people. In addition, researchers must be able to answer ‘no’ to the following questions for the 14 days prior to their planned visit (taken from [VA Dept of Health guidelines](#)). ***These requirements are waived for anyone who provides proof of full vaccination prior to arrival.***

Have you had

1. A new fever (100.4°F or higher) or a sense of having a fever?
 2. A new cough?
 3. New shortness of breath?
 4. New chills?
 5. A new sore throat?
 6. New muscle aches (myalgia)?
- Complete UVA online COVID awareness & precaution training module from EHS or the equivalent from your home institution
 - Complete daily health acknowledgement (UVA) or any equivalent from your home institution
 - Fill out a daily attendance log while working in lab spaces at the ABCRC

To reduce the risk of transmission between communities, visiting researchers are asked to minimize visits to local businesses and attractions during their stay; use of take-out options are encouraged. Such restrictions apply to grocery stores, bars, ice cream shops, and convenience stores, among others.

When planning for short overnight stays, each visitor should bring what they need for the duration of the visit. Scientists conducting intermittent research are encouraged to make day trips when feasible and to minimize repeated stays as much as possible. Between the options to make two overnight visits or stay once for three nights, plan to do the latter. Researchers and staff should coordinate closely to maximize productivity while minimizing travel and community contact.

Anyone who begins experiencing symptoms* while at the facility must immediately cease research activity, alert the station director (or staff), self-isolate, and seek testing by calling *Eastville Community Health Center* at (757) 331-1086. Plan to return home as soon as possible, and stay in contact with station staff, the University, and the local health department to facilitate contact tracing if the test results are positive. ABCRC sign in/out logs and float plans will be used to facilitate contact tracing, as needed. **(*i.e. answering “yes” to any of the six [6] screening questions above)**

Station staff will alert all visitors and employees if a case of COVID-19 is suspected on site.

Any visiting researchers should also alert the station director if you develop symptoms within 14 days of your time at the ABCRC.

For summer 2021, our visiting researchers will be arranged into short term visitors and a ‘pod’ of summer residents. Non-podmates should not ride in vehicles together, sit for a meal together, share a bathroom, enter each other’s housing units, or be within six feet of each other. Special precaution should be taken to ensure that research protocols and field excursion do not put non-podmates within 6 feet of each other.

Vaccinated individuals

Individuals are considered fully vaccinated two weeks after their final COVID vaccine dose is administered. Fully vaccinated individuals are pardoned from pre-visit self-quarantine and testing requirements (the latter is only for summer residents).

Boat capacity limits are increased if all passengers are vaccinated.

Vaccinated individuals should continue masking and social distancing indoors and in public spaces.

Policies for vaccinated individuals may be updated throughout the summer to reflect University policy changes.

Individuals must provide proof of full vaccination to the station director in order to be exempted from any COVID safety restrictions.

Housing

Summer Residents

Those individuals residing on site throughout the summer research season will form a single pod in order to facilitate projects and learning.

To join the pod:

Before arriving to join the pod, summer residents are expected to

- 1) *meet the criteria for visiting the lab (i.e. avoiding high risk activities for 14 days prior to arrival),
- 2) *provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test result within 72 hours of – or as close as feasible to – arriving on site,
- 3) read and sign an agreement to abide by the station and pod COVID-19 safety policies.

Upon arrival, each person will be housed in separate bedrooms for the first week and is expected to maintain distancing and masking*, even among pod members. Post-arrival testing will be arranged for three days from arrival. Once negative tests are confirmed, pod members will be moved to shared housing and may reduce masking and distancing within their shared group.

*Those who provide proof of [full vaccination](#) are pardoned from pre- and post-arrival safety procedures (i.e., isolation and testing). Vaccinated individuals are still required to sign safety protocols.

Individuals not meeting these criteria will be otherwise accommodated if possible; if alternative accommodations are not reasonably available, then the resident may be asked to delay arrival until the conditions can be met. Individuals who test positive during the arrival process will be asked to delay their arrival or return home until they can meet the criteria to safely join the pod.

While in the pod:

Pod members should follow [UVA guidelines for pods](#), including restricting social activities to within the pod. Members are expected to minimize contact and use masking and distancing protocols with individuals outside the pod. Pod members should avoid travel away from the research station during their residency. If travel is necessary, then a plan for safe return should be discussed with the Station Director before travel. Even within the pod, gatherings will be capped at the capacities set by University of Virginia. UVA-designated capacities will be posted on site. Open air settings and physical distancing are always preferred when gathering.

Biweekly COVID testing is expected for any individuals who are not fully vaccinated. If testing is not available through your home institution, then it can sought (with the help of staff, as needed) locally through Eastern Shore Rural Health or CVS Pharmacy in Onley.

Permitted conduct	Prohibited conduct	Rationale
Shared use of a room with other pod members or individuals who are fully vaccinated,	Shared use of a room, working within 6' or without a mask, with individuals from outside	Under UVA policies, the sizes of our lab and housing spaces only allow safe use by one individual

including lab spaces and living spaces. Masking and social distancing should continue except within podded residence spaces.	the pod who are not fully vaccinated. If you are unsure, assume individuals are not vaccinated.	at a time (unless vaccinated or sharing a pod).
Outdoor exploration and social outings with pod members and vaccinated individuals to open air spaces. Getting take-out from community businesses. Masks and distancing should be maintained while in the community.	Eating in or spending time in community businesses, especially with individuals from outside the pod. Failing to wear a mask and maintain distance while in the community.	To reduce the exchange of risk between the local community and our research community, visiting researchers (including summer residents) are asked to minimize risky environments and contact with the community. All safety precautions should be used while in public.
Outdoor, distanced (6') gatherings with individuals within and beyond the pod. Masks should be worn if distance cannot be maintained.	Outdoor gatherings without distancing or masking or indoor gatherings with individuals outside the pod.	Even outdoors, failure to maintain safe distance or use masks when socializing with individuals outside the pod can introduce risk for other pod members.
Pod members should avoid traveling away from the station during their residency. If travel is necessary (e.g. for medical or cultural needs), then a plan for safe return must be established in advance with the station director.	Travelling without a plan for safe return. Failing to confirm a plan with the site director may result in suspending or delaying your return to the program.	Travel outside of the local study area and away from the pod can introduce risk to other pod members. Returning from travel will need to be accompanied by the same safety protocols employed when entering the pod originally.

Failing to abide by the established pod policies will be considered misconduct. *Behavior will be considered misconduct if it is reasonably likely to put others in the pod at risk.* Anyone who witnesses misconduct by a pod member is encouraged to provide an immediate reminder of pod policies, which may provide the quickest way to minimize risk. If you feel uncomfortable speaking up directly, or if intervening does not stop the misconduct, then the incident should be promptly reported to the Station Director (Cora Baird) or Lead PI (Karen McGlathery). Reports will be investigated. We will first seek resolutions to the situation, but verified misconduct, especially any that is ongoing or severe, is grounds for dismissal from the facility and summer programs. Your safety is our priority, and pods are built around shared conduct and trust.

In case of symptoms or a positive test within the pod:

The person displaying symptoms or receiving a positive test will be isolated in D suite for at least 10 days or until a negative test result.

Other members of the pod will quarantine in place, within their designated housing spaces for fourteen days or for five days followed by a negative test result. However, following [CDC guidelines](#), individuals who are fully vaccinated do not need to quarantine and may continue research. If additional individuals

become ill, they will be given space to isolate in the suite previously designated for short-term visits (which will be suspended).

Support for individuals in quarantine, such as grocery delivery, will be provided by staff or vaccinated members of the pod.

Short term visits to the station will be suspended for the duration of any quarantine period on site. Fully vaccinated individuals may continue to make day trips or continue visits if housing space allows.

Housing

Short Term Visitors

Follow policies for all visitors (above) to prepare for each visit.

While on site:

Visitors are expected to wear face coverings whenever outside your suite.

Short term lodging will be established at moderate densities. No more than one research group will be housed per wing of a suite. Our default density will be one person per bedroom, which is equivalent to two persons per bathroom and up to 4 people per kitchen. Densities may only be higher if visiting research groups arrive in 'pods' that can safely share living space. In such cases, use of common spaces may be coordinated (e.g., scheduled meal preparation times) to limit overlap between groups.

Visitors are encouraged to occupy open air spaces whenever reasonable. Distancing (6') should be maintained during any shared use of the decks and porches. *Masks may be removed in open air outdoor spaces when a space greater than 6' can be maintained.*

Each suite will have a designated picnic table (see the letter label).

Outdoor chairs should be sanitized regularly.

A grill is available for cooking outside.

We will maintain increased cleaning standards throughout the facility.

Overnight visitors are expected to

1. Sanitize surfaces before and after each use. (For example, kitchen surfaces should be wiped down with approved solution after each meal is prepared.)
 - a. Clean high touch surfaces (light switches, door knobs, etc) at least twice a day using the cleaning supplies provided.
2. Use the clean linens provided, washing them in the laundry facilities as needed during your visit.
3. Upon departure
 - a. Remove all linens that you used and place them in the linen service bags on the porch (near suite A). Place any non-white items in the designated hamper.
 - b. Any dishes used should be washed on hot with detergent and left in the dishwasher.
 - c. Wipe high touch surfaces on your way out.

Housekeeping will clean weekly and between visitors (room turnover), following UVA custodial recommendations:

1. Housekeeping staff will wear masks inside all buildings.
2. All staff have received training on how COVID 19 spreads and how to protect yourself when entering a space that was occupied by someone who tested positive for COVID 19.

3. We treat all surfaces as if they are contaminated and observe universal precautions.
4. Use an EPA certified disinfectant and make sure the proper dwell time is followed to kill COVID 19.
5. Touch points, restrooms, kitchenettes, and any shared spaces should be disinfected more frequently.

If someone begins to show symptoms (see the six screening questions in pre-visit section)

- Alert staff, follow the response plan outlined above (for testing and tracing), and make plans to depart the facility promptly.
 - Visiting research groups should establish an evacuation plan in case symptoms emerge within the group during your visit.
- Use the following procedure upon vacating the suite
 - All white linens should be washed in hot water with bleach and then placed in the linen service hampers. They will be professionally laundered by ABCRC's contractor during regular service.
 - If you have used an ABCRC pillow, dispose of it with your garbage.
 - Used dishes should be run in the dishwasher on the hot setting and left sealed.
 - Garbage should be gathered into the bags provided and disposed of directly in the dumpster on premises.
- Vacated suites will remain locked for 48 hours prior to be cleaned following approved protocols, using designated solutions, by our housekeeping contractor.
- In case symptoms emerge, all visitors have the right to vacate the facility and may be asked to vacate ahead of schedule. Any visitor who leaves should stay in contact with station staff and the University.

Research Labs

Check in/out logs will be posted in the front hallway and in the Prep Lab. Every person entering the lab building must sign in/out and list the spaces occupied that day. Sanitizer and policies will be posted at each entrance. Wipe all workstations with sanitizing cleaners (provided) before and after your lab work. *Congregating is strictly prohibited, especially in transitional spaces like the Prep Lab. **Room occupancy limits will be posted throughout the lab. Except where specified, rooms should always be occupied by only a single user.*** Any person occupying a lab is encouraged to close doors and open windows to optimize air flow and safety. Alternative workstations are available on the porches. Researchers living on site or visiting overnight should use the bathroom in their suite to minimize shared use of lab bathrooms. **Everyone is encouraged to take responsibility for monitoring room occupancy and dispersing unintentional gatherings.**

Common use equipment will be used on an assigned basis and should be cleaned between uses. As needed, laboratory equipment will be decentralized to allow assigned use without sharing (e.g., for freezers and ovens).

The front porch rinse station is retained for field gear clean up.

The back porch rinse station is an available workstation.

The front door is designated as an entrance only. Any other door may be used to exit the lab.

During loading and unloading, Prep Lab doors should be propped open to reduce frequent touching and to minimize contact between people coming and going.

Use of the seminar room is restricted. Staff and members of the summer residents pod may use the seminar room. It has been set up to maximize spacing and should not be rearranged without permission from the Station Director. An outdoor screening and meeting space will be provided.

Vehicles

In all phases, commonly touched surfaces should be cleaned with an [EPA-approved solution](#) before returning the vehicle. Only staff may use vehicles.

Boats

Boating density restrictions remain in place.

- *If anyone aboard is unvaccinated (or status unknown):* Maximum operating capacity is 2 passengers plus the operator (3 people total on boats over 21'). Only one passenger and operator are permitted on boats under 21'.
- *If everyone aboard is vaccinated:* Maximum operating capacity is 4 passengers plus the operator (5 people total on boats over 21'). No more than 3 people are permitted on boats under 21'.
 - Note that all staff operators will be fully vaccinated as of May 5th.
- While stationary (boarding, loading, deploying equipment) on a boat with two persons aboard, the captain occupies the stern while the passenger occupies the bow. While underway, the two occupants should reside on opposite sides (starboard and port) of the boat as distant as is safely feasible.

- To further reduce risk of airborne contamination while underway, boats will be operated at a maximum speed of 2500-3000 rpms or the lowest rate at which planing can be maintained on any given vessel.
 - Personnel densities aboard are conservatively determined by boat footage; these calculations make the most sense based on a stationary platform, so partitioning of passengers on board during operation is needed to further reduce risk.
- Face coverings must be worn whenever reasonable while underway; fishing buffs can help keep cotton face masks in place while underway. ***Buffs alone do not provide adequate protection and should not be worn in place of cloth or surgical masks.***
- While working aboard, each person is responsible for handling their own supplies, including research equipment and personal provisions. Each person will have access to a dedicated cooler for supplies; no shared drinks or foods will be permitted.

Each boat will contain a supply of hand sanitizer that should be used before/after eating and drinking or when shared surfaces are unavoidable (e.g. boarding ladder).

The influences of both proximity and ventilation (air exchange) on risk of virus exposure were considered in the development of these policies. Some overview of what is known is [available here](#).

Field work

As possible, bring and maintain your own field gear. Each person should select and retain field gear for the duration of the season to avoid sharing or exchange of materials.

Buffs, snorkels, and wetsuits (among others) should be maintained and cleaned by the user throughout the season or visit.

At the end of the field season or major sampling campaigns, all reusable field gear will be washed by staff with EPA approved solutions.

Always wear face coverings, as is reasonably safe (e.g. not if a wet mask unreasonably restricts breathing).

Maintain social distancing (6'); as needed, protocols should be adapted to enable distancing. To help with logistics, *try planning your research as if each person is diving and needs to be able to function independently during sampling* (i.e., avoid handing off materials or samples, have a plan for data recording without people in close proximity).

Staff will have resources on hand to help facilitate more independence (e.g. less exchange of materials) during sampling.

No one should execute protocols for which distance cannot be maintained unless negative tests can be confirmed for all field members directly adjacent to sampling days. Research teams are responsible for coordinating testing if that approach is used.

For everyone: **work at low densities but never alone**. Confirm your plan for a field buddy with staff.

If you find yourself or your field buddy in need of first aid, be sure to use PPE and maintain distance whenever possible (e.g. by directing response rather than administering it yourself). If you need medical assistance, please call ahead before visiting a medical facility.

If you are ever in doubt of the pod or vaccination status of a fellow researcher,
use all COVID precautions as if risk is high.

To help with the uncertainty and anxiety induced by the COVID 19 situation, counseling and mental health services are available through UVA and local community services.

UVA Counseling And Psychological Services (CAPS) at 434-243-5150 and 434-297-4261 after hours

Eastern Shore Community Services Board Emergency Services call center at 757-442-7707



Coastal Research Center

Appendix: Resources & General Guidance

Our policies and decisions at the Coastal Research Center will be based on Federal, State, County, and University of Virginia public health recommendations and will be guided by information on COVID-19 prevention and response from reliable sources.

Virginia Coronavirus overview + status <https://www.virginia.gov/coronavirus/>

Virginia Dept of Health <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/>

Virginia guidelines for moving into Phase I

<https://www.virginia.gov/coronavirus/forwardvirginia/#856423>

UVA continuation of research <https://research.virginia.edu/ResearchContinuity>

Current (as of March 15, 2021) general guidelines for prevention of Covid-19 include:

1. **Vaccination**, which is fully effective two weeks after the final dose
2. **Mask wearing** (properly fitted to cover mouth and nose) – *Note that buffs alone do not provide adequate protection and should not be worn in place of cloth or surgical masks.*
3. **Hygiene** (e.g., wash hands, avoid touching face, wipe surfaces)
4. **Physical (Social) Distancing** 6 ft (2m) minimum
5. **Quarantine & Isolation** If you are sick or may have been exposed, self-quarantine for two weeks.
6. Cleaning and disinfection protocols follow UVA custodial guidance (see below) to minimize environmental exposure and use [EPA-approved sanitizing solutions](#).
7. Additional CDC and VA guidance on PPE, hygiene, and quarantine
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>
<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/cloth-face-covers/>
<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/frequently-asked-questions/isolation-quarantine-movement-restrictions-public-health-monitoring/>



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