

## Purpose

To emphasise the risk mitigation strategies for field work, ground transport and accommodation in the context of COVID-19 response.

## Background

Field work risk management at the University is supported by comprehensive Health and Safety Field Work Guidance, Field Work Plan template and Field Work Risk Assessment form. These processes guide field work organisers and participants to identify, assess and establish risk control plans for the health and safety risks associated with the field work.

COVID-19 introduces new risks that need to be considered as part of field work risk assessment and planning. In addition to the direct risk of transmission of COVID-19 during field work, COVID-19 responses by governments, transport operators, accommodation providers and those who manage and control field work locations, may also impact on the risk level of risk control plans.

## Participants

The number of participants should be minimised with consideration to interactions undertaken without physical contact. The number of participants must be limited to current Victorian Government allowable maximum gatherings for [Business, travel, retail and personal services](#)

Activities should comply with physical distancing (1.5 metres from other people), wherever possible. Where physical distancing is not possible, risk-based strategies should be implemented.

Close contact with others outside the field work participants should be avoided or minimised.

Field work participation is voluntary for those at risk (vulnerable persons) of severe adverse outcomes due to COVID-19 exposure.

## Predeparture considerations

Pre-departure considerations for field work which involves ground transport, remote locations or other circumstances such as where physical distancing between participants cannot be maintained are:

- Predeparture briefing
- Participants minimising their close contact with others during the 14 days leading up to field work
- Predeparture temperature checks (optional)

## Health declaration

Participants are not permitted to attend a field trip if they:

- Are sick, unwell or have a new illness, especially a fever, sore throat, cough, shortness of breath or other respiratory symptoms
- Are currently required to self-isolate
- Have been tested for COVID-19 and are awaiting a test result
- Have been in close contact with a case of COVID-19
- Have returned from overseas in the last 14 days

Participants must complete the Health declaration confirming they are free of conditions and events that may result in the transmission of COVID-19. Links to the Health declaration include:

- Staff: [Health declaration](#)
- Declaration for others (eg students): [Declaration for other campus users](#)

## COVIDSafe Campus training

Participants must complete the COVIDSafe Campus online module available in [TrainME](#)

## Ground transport

Consideration must be given to social distancing and steps to minimise infection transmission during transport. For example:

- Single occupant (or multiple household members) per vehicle where possible
- If multiple occupants must share a vehicle:
  - Physical distancing should be practiced so far as is reasonably practicable e.g. a driver and one left rear passenger in a 5-passenger vehicle or staggered seating in a bus
  - Ventilation should be set for flow through (not recirculation) or windows left open when possible to allow fresh air inside vehicle
  - High touch surfaces (door handle, steering wheel, gear stick, switches, knobs, etc) should be cleaned and disinfected before trip and after the trip
  - Eating and touching your face should be avoided
  - Hands should be washed upon arrival at destination
- Mixing passenger cohorts should be avoided where multiple vehicles are in use
- Sanitising measures should be used when refuelling at petrol stations.

## Shared equipment

Sanitiser or medical wipes are to be used on frequently touched surfaces such as field equipment, satellite phones, first aid kits etc. Personal protective equipment (PPE) should be considered for handling of equipment that will be used by multiple people.

PPE, disinfectant and cleaning products should be available in the field.

## Food and water

Steps must be taken to minimise infection transmission during access to water, food preparation and food service.

Hands are to be washed prior to eating.

Adequate food, drinks and supplies should be taken to ensure adequate provisions for the entire trip. There is the possibility that local shops may not have adequate supplies.

## Accommodation

Steps must be taken to minimise transmission during overnight stays that require accommodation e.g. through physical distancing and hygiene measures.

A single unit per participant (or household) is the preferred type of accommodation.

Sharing facilities (bathroom, toilet, kitchen) should be avoided, unless supported by COVID-19 cleaning and disinfection plan. Sharing facilities with other field work participants is preferred over publicly shared facilities (e.g. camp sites with kitchens and toilets shared publicly).

Shared sleeping arrangement (unless from same household) should be avoided as is the least preferred option. Physical distancing (1.5 metres between beds and at least 4m<sup>2</sup> space per occupant) and a COVID-19 cleaning and disinfection plan is required if proceed with a shared sleeping arrangement.

Field work organisers should confirm COVIDSafe plans or arrangements with accommodation providers.

## Waste management

Steps must be taken to mitigate transmission associated with waste collection and management. Some waste should be treated as having an increased risk of contamination of COVID-19 (for example, single use PPE such as face masks and gloves, tissues and alcohol wipes, disposable cutlery and plates).

## External collaborators and other parties

Field work with external collaborators is permitted, provided the external researchers agree to abide by all University controls and requirements. It is likely they will expect the same cooperation from University personnel. In the case of differences, the more conservative approach is to be implemented by all participants from both organisations.

A letter of commitment for consultation, cooperation and coordination should be completed and shared between the University of Melbourne and any third party that will be engaged during the field work (for example, a catering company, an accommodation owner, a bus company or visiting someone's home). The letter identifies what controls both the University of Melbourne and the third party are undertaking to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19.

## Emergencies associated with COVID-19

An emergency plan must be developed in the event of a confirmed case or requirement to isolate or self-quarantine as per the Victorian Government requirements: [Quarantine and isolation](#). The University Public Network Group must be contacted for advice and direction.

Contact details of all field work participants and other close contacts must be kept.

## Risk assessment and controls

Risk assessment and controls must take into account and include risk mitigation strategies for COVID-19.

The COVID-19 virus is transmitted from someone infected with the virus to other close contacts with that person through contaminated droplets spread by coughing or sneezing, or by contact with contaminated hands, surfaces or objects. There is minimal evidence that the virus can cause infection through ingestion.

The risks associated with COVID-19 include:

- Infected persons may be asymptomatic
- Severe respiratory distress and illness
- Death
- At risk/vulnerable individuals have a greater risk of severe outcomes, including death

The success of assessing the risk requires identifying those parts of the activity that have a potential exposure and transmission of COVID-19 between people.

Risk mitigation controls/strategies of COVID-19 between people include:

- Participation of COVID-19 free individuals – Government isolation and quarantine requirements and University Health declaration must be followed.
- Physical distancing – as required by Victorian Government restriction levels.
- Hand hygiene – hand washing and hand sanitiser.
- Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, particularly high touch points and shared facilities/equipment.
- Ventilation in closed environments.
- Proprietary behaviours when coughing or sneezing.

Risk assessments should be reviewed to determine the effectiveness to reduce transmission of COVID-19 and to ensure that they are meeting current Government and University requirements.