

Academic Field Trip Safety Considerations

Canadian and provincial health authorities continue to impose restrictions on non-essential activities and travel due to the current COVID-19 situation. This will have repercussions on all academic activities, including field trips¹ and fieldwork². Due to the complexity and variability of academic fieldwork during the pandemic, deans will review each request (in consultation with the Office of the Vice Provost Academic Affairs if a second opinion is deemed necessary) to assess whether an academic field project is considered essential. In accordance with government restrictions related to essential services, academic field trip approvals will only be granted if the field trip meets requirements.

Current hygiene requirements, including physical distancing and handwashing, are difficult to achieve in a field setting. Therefore, the dean will only consider field trip proposals that can demonstrate that they meet health authority directives and requirements. This includes:

- Maintaining physical distancing of at least two metres;
- Self-isolation when exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19;
- Abiding by all applicable travel restrictions (national and international), including those affecting travel within Canada; and
- Avoiding travel to rural areas.

The University of Ottawa must ensure that its campus community is equipped and empowered to operate in a healthy and safe environment. Researchers and students from many University departments conduct annual off-campus field trips and fieldwork activities. These activities – while enriching and valuable experiences – can subject participants to various risks that they would not otherwise encounter. The uOttawa [Fieldwork Safety Guidelines](#) prioritize the health and safety of participants and serve as a first step in preparing participants for risks they may encounter in the field. Thorough planning and preparation are essential to ensuring the health and safety of all participants; this document will outline general health and safety recommendations for individuals to consider before leaving for fieldwork activities.

Basic considerations are provided below to assist in planning and implementing measures designed to protect participants from COVID-19. These considerations are intended for application in conjunction with the [Fieldwork Safety Guidelines](#).

¹ An academic field trip is as a course-related activity that serves educational purposes and occurs at a location other than the classroom or campus.

² A fieldwork activity means an organized and authorized research activity or series of educational activities outside the geographical boundaries of the University of Ottawa.

What do I need to consider when planning a field trip?

The field trip checklist below lists some of the factors to consider when planning an academic field trip:

1. Goals and objectives
2. Itinerary and destination
3. Assessment, mitigation, and communication of risks prior to departure

Complete a Risk Assessment and Mitigation (Consult the [Fieldwork Safety Guideline](#) for additional information).

The field trip leader(s) should conduct an orientation session for participants prior to departure. The type of field trip will dictate the level of detail needed in the orientation, but both verbal and written communication are essential. Orientation materials should include:

- trip destination, purpose, and a travel itinerary (route, rest and meal stops)
 - lodging information
 - transportation information
 - appropriate clothing and/or gear
 - emergency and check-in protocol, as well as specific information related to the field trip and Covid-19
 - information about hazards or risks specific to the location and related mitigation measures
 - a summary of activities and the physical requirements participants will need to fulfill to participate in these activities
 - any known or unusual circumstances that would require advanced preparation or equipment
4. Emergency response plan and contingency plans
 - Determine a protocol for circumstances that may require the field trip leader(s) to leave the group to accompany an injured or ill participant
 - Participants must be provided with instructions on how to summon assistance in case of all types of emergency (medical, safety, violence, harassment, etc.) and how to report injury, hazards, etc.
 - Despite the best planning efforts, things can still go wrong. Try to anticipate complications that could arise, and then develop contingency plans in advance

- Team leader(s) should be equipped with the emergency contact information for each participant and group.
5. Communication device and check-in protocol
 - Communication devices must be available and all participants should be informed about the check-in protocol. Confirmation that cell phones will operate from the field trip site should be made in advance so that alternative arrangements can be made if necessary
 - Participants should download the SecureUO application to their cell phones. They should use the app's "[work alone](#)" feature to check-in and confirm they are safe. The feature allows a user to receive, and respond to, push notifications at predetermined times. Failure to respond to a push notification within five minutes will initiate a call to a designated emergency contact number. The feature is free of charge but requires participants to be in a cell phone coverage zone.
 6. Accommodations during travel
 - Ensure extra lodging is available to maintain social distancing, i.e. single rooms, single tents.
 7. Need for first aid supplies and expertise
 - For groups of any size, at least one member must be certified in standard first aid, at a minimum, and have access to a first aid kit. In a remote location, where access to civic emergency services is not readily available, at least two participants should be trained in wilderness first aid and upgrade their first aid kit to a wilderness-type one, including a thermometer and other items relevant to their field trip site.
 8. Medical needs of travelers with pre-existing conditions
 - Participants should consult their doctors to ensure they are in good health and physically fit enough to participate in fieldwork activities (for example, review allergic reactions, immunization updates (such as for tetanus), etc. Participants are encouraged to update their recommended immunizations and/or vaccines.
 - Accommodations may be required for participants who are going on the field trip and have disabilities or special requirements
 9. Clothing, personal equipment, and field equipment (consult the [Fieldwork Safety Guidelines](#) for additional information)

- Participants should be informed of the weather conditions expected at the site to assist them in dressing properly
- In addition to the tools, parts, and/or equipment required for the field trip, the organizers must supply:
 - Soap and water, or hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol
 - Supplied cleaners or disinfectants
 - Disposable gloves to use in cleaning and disinfection
 - Disposable garbage bags
 - Non-medical face masks (strongly encouraged, especially when physical distancing is challenging)
 - Tissues (optional)

10. Transportation

- Team leader(s) may choose to make the transportation arrangements to get participants to and from the field trip destination. The University owns vehicles and has agreements with commercial ground carriers to meet this need.
- Minimize the number of passengers to ensure proper physical distancing and maximize the distance between participants inside the vehicle (e.g., one person per seat in a school bus, separated by an empty row, the driver and only one passenger in a four door or standard-sized vehicle, etc.).
- Note that transportation companies, including airlines, have enhanced prevention measures to increase the health and safety of passengers and their crew. Check the travel provider's website before leaving to review the required check-in, boarding, and transportation steps. This includes face coverings, health screening questions, etc. (for example, [review the Air Canada requirements](#)). Anyone who is symptomatic should not use group transportation. Consider alternative transportation arrangements for symptomatic individuals who need to return from a fieldtrip site.

11. Food, water, and supplies on site and during travel to and from the site

- Participants must be informed of arrangements related to food and water supplies. Practice safe food handling methods to reduce the sharing of food and utensils (e.g., do not use self-serve buffets, have servers serve food, etc.).

12. Mandatory safety training in specific areas of risk applicable to the event as appropriate

- Individuals who participate in field trips in remote locations must be well-informed on the local wildlife and how to respond when encountering hazardous wildlife situations. They should have wilderness first aid training and any additional training specific to the risks or hazard of the location.

13. Necessary University forms

- This could include certificates of insurance, waivers, authorisations, permits, etc.

What are the measures to implement to protect and/or reduce the transmission of the COVID-19 coronavirus?

The team leader(s) must review the latest information available on COVID-19. They should [get the facts about COVID-19](#), including basic facts, symptoms and treatment, by checking official health authority websites.

Pre-Departure

- Participants should be monitoring themselves for COVID-19 symptoms prior to departure, for at least 14 days following arrival at their destination, and upon their return. This will assist in early detection and might include measures such as cancelling the trip for the affected participant(s), self-isolation, and providing proper care in a timely fashion to the affected participant, etc. Please visit [the Ontario Health website](#) (and the health authority of the destination) and ensure that all participants monitor themselves for symptoms and take the COVID-19 self-assessment tool prior to leaving or if they develop symptoms.
- The team leader(s) must provide daily reminders and education to all participants about COVID-19 prevention, signs, and symptoms.

Keeping Distant

- Minimize the number of passengers to ensure proper distancing and maximize the distance between participants inside the vehicle (e.g., one person per seat in school type bus, separated by an empty row, the driver and only one passenger in a four door or standard-sized vehicle, etc.).
- Avoid using the recirculated air option for the vehicle's ventilation.
- If possible, drive with the windows open to maximize airflow.

- Avoid unnecessary contact with frequently touched surfaces (such as door frame/handles, windows, seatbelt buckles, etc.).
- All participants must handle their own personal bags, cell phones, and belongings during loading and unloading. Do not share materials or items (such as cigarettes, vaping equipment, etc.).
- Limit intermixing of seats and teams; try to keep teams as assigned.
- Ensure participants keep 2 meters (6 feet) apart at all time for the duration of all activities (transportation, lodging, eating, field activities, etc.).

Wear a non-medical mask

- Everyone inside the vehicle is strongly encouraged to wear a non-medical mask during each trip. This can assist in reducing the spread of respiratory droplets to others.
- Non-medical masks have limitations and are not personal protective devices. They must be used appropriately and safely, namely by:
 - Washing hands immediately before putting a mask on and immediately after removing it.
 - Covering nose and mouth with the mask: it should fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face.
 - Avoid touching the mask while using it and not sharing it with others.
 - Avoiding touching eyes, nose and mouth when removing the mask; wash hands, or use hand sanitizer, immediately after removing the mask.
 - Discarding disposable masks and replacing them when they become damp, soiled, or crumpled. Disposable masks should be thrown out by placing the mask properly in a garbage bin.
 - Wearing a non-medical mask does not allow a sick participant to take part in the field trip. Participants who are sick must stay home, or self-isolate themselves if they fall ill during the trip.

Hand hygiene

- Immediately before and after each trip, or before eating or drinking, participants should wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and not share the drying towel.

- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.

Clean and disinfect

- Before and after each trip, clean or disinfect the frequently touched surfaces in the vehicle (if your own vehicle); disinfection procedures should be included in the contract for rented vehicles.

Respiratory etiquette when coughing or sneezing

- Cough or sneeze into the elbow or a tissue, even if wearing a facemask.
- Dispose of used tissues as soon as possible in a garbage bag.