

Research Resumption Phase: Fall Semester | FAQs

September 2020

Please note that the following FAQs will be updated as guidance evolves.

Q: What is the accurate name of this phase – 2.5 or 3.0 or III? How should we refer to it?

A: Our initial plans to move to a Phase III were made last spring based on the assumption that the pandemic would be under control by the time the fall semester was underway.

However, under the current circumstances it is not viable in the near-term to transition to Phase III as initially conceived; therefore, the next step in research resumption is the “Fall Semester Phase.”

Q: Are there any voluntary or opt-in options for Fall Semester Phase?

A: Fall Semester Phase is a fully deployed phase. There are no voluntary or opt-in options.

Q: Please elaborate on guidelines to determine how many people can safely occupy a floor of each research building. How many people can safely work in a research laboratory space or occupy a floor of a research building?

A: The guidelines for spacing may vary, such as the length of a bench varies by building. What remains a guiding principle is that the density in the lab cannot result in the inability to socially distance in any associated general spaces.

For this reason, the policy states that a revised resumption plan that specifically justifies the proposed increase must be developed by the PI and approved by the School. The approvers in the School will understand the implications of increased density in several labs in the same building to general spaces and can decline on that basis as well. The expectation is that the PIs will not increase density in order to shorten schedules.

Q: How will PIs update their research resumption plans for Fall Semester Phase?

A: All PIs who previously submitted plans via REDCap will be emailed a personalized link to update their plans for the Fall Semester Phase by the end of this week. New plans are only required for labs that anticipate increases in density (minimum 6 ft distance must be maintained), include procedural changes, or propose additional activities to the original or Phase II plans. If you do not receive your dedicated link by Friday afternoon, please contact [Jim Riley](#).

Q: Can we increase the number of people per bay in our PSOM labs?

A: Where it is possible to maintain at least 6 ft distance, it is feasible for some labs to have 2 or 3 people per bay if they are at opposite ends of the bay. This should be included in the research resumption plans. For close contact research, the research resumption plan should address the type of activity, location of the research, plan to minimize the number of people in the research space, necessity and duration of close contact, ventilation at the location, personal protective equipment use, cleaning protocols and identify those involved in the procedures. The conditions of the exception should be included in the research resumption plan and approval by the appropriate school committee or official is required.

Contact the Office of Environmental Health and Radiation Safety for information on the precautions required to perform close contact research safely at EHRS@EHRS.upenn.edu.

Please note that we continue to monitor for overall density on the floor.

Q: The document states that research for graduate students, postdocs, and other researchers is not voluntary. What about research staff? Are they required to come to campus for essential duties?

A: Staff employees adhere to the Human Resources employee policies. In principle, employees did not have the option not to work if the function was required on campus. Work that can be done remotely should continue to be done remotely for staff as well as faculty, students and postdocs. The Office of Affirmative Action has a process for staff to request an accommodation when someone feels they need specific support to carry out their responsibilities. PSOM Human Resources can also be contacted if there is a medical concern that may require such recourse as a leave. At this time, there is much flexibility in trying to find resolutions.

Note that as of September 30, salaries cannot be paid on federal grants if the person (student, postdoc, or staff) are not contributing to the research supported by the grant. If this issue arises, alternative sources of funding need to be identified if the person will continue to be paid.

Q: In this phase, are there exemptions allowed for high-risk individuals? Will those individuals have to take a leave?

A: First, please note that “mandatory research” does not imply mandatory on-campus research.

In principle, graduate students have not had the option to opt out of making reasonable academic progress; much can be done remotely, though not all projects can be completed with this approach. Students should be advised by department chairs, thesis committees, advisors, etc. on how to manage the current circumstances. If there are challenges, including those imposed due to high risk, the usual academic processes should be invoked to find solutions for that person.

Postdocs, as trainees, should be provided the same type of support in navigating the challenges. If a person has high risk, this should be addressed with the help of faculty advisors, department chairs, etc.

The approach to supporting staff is addressed above.

Q: We have a sabbatical visitor who has been appointed visiting scholar (happened before the restrictions were in place). How do we handle this person's physical presence such as assigning offices and when to allow access?

A: These should follow our travel and research resumption plans. Arrangements would be to work remotely whenever possible; when in labs or issued offices, they should be included in resumption plans and the increase in density accounted for, and approved by the school. Traveling to Penn could require quarantine.

This is the same as hiring a postdoc. They need to understand the constraints before coming to campus, might need to begin working remotely, and the host/advisor and scholar should agree that it can be productive under the circumstances.

Q: Can we consider visitors who would like to come for 1-2 weeks to train in particular lab techniques or do short term collaborative experiments?

A: These should be delayed, if at all possible, at least to the next semester. If approved, the activity needs to be compliant with resumption plans and approval.

Q: What are the policies for non-Penn visitors—this would include short-term (1-2 days), mid-term (under a month), and long-term?

A: This would be determined by University policy with submission of exceptions provided to the Office of the Vice Provost for Research.