What do I need to do to get approval for off-campus research under the MQ COVIDSafe Plan (low-risk)?

What does off-campus research include?

Activities undertaken by staff or HDR students in the following research categories:
1) Fieldwork (non-human)
2) Fieldwork (collections)
3) Human participant (organisations)
4) Human participant (private individuals)
5) Human participant (at risk populations)
6) Research meetings (e.g. collaborations, conferences, seminars, workshops, meetings)

Applications are to be submitted at least 2 weeks before proposed travel. Applications without due notice will be delayed.

What is the difference between Phases in the MQ COVIDSafe Plan for Research?

The COVIDSafe Plan for Research, which was in operation throughout 2020, serves as our guidelines for high risk COVIDSafe planning either when the VC calls our status as “high risk” or for off campus sites or situations that we determine are high risk. That COVIDSafe Plan for Research contains three Phases 1, 2, 3, dependent on the level of restrictions in place at any given time.

With the easing of restrictions the VC has called for a Low-risk Phase to be triggered. With this comes a simplification in the planning and approvals process where possible.

This fact sheet outlines that process for off-campus research activities in the categories listed above.

MQ COVIDSafe Low-risk Research Principles – “lines of defence”

All research must incorporate the following four “lines of defence” recommended by MQ Risk & Assurance:
1. Do not come to campus (or attend your off-campus research activity) if: you are unwell; you have been advised by a physician to take a COVID-19 test; you are awaiting COVID-19 test results; you have been advised by NSW Health to self-isolate; or have been to a NSW Health COVID-19 case location resulting in you have been identified a ‘close’ or ‘casual contact.
2. All staff and students should continue to practice good hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette during all research activities.
3. Maintaining 1.5m physical distancing is recommended, and where unable to maintain 1.5m physical distancing wearing a face mask is recommended.
4. The capacity of spaces on-campus or off-campus should not exceed the ‘pre-calculated maximum capacity’ of the size of the space or specified square-meter rule requirements designated under a relevant NSW Government COVID-19 Safety Plan for particular settings identified in the Public Health (COVID-19 Restrictions on Gathering and Movement) Order 2021 (PHO-RGM) and outlined on the NSW Government COVID-19 Safety Plans.

What you need to do during a COVIDSafe Low-risk Phase to do off-campus research?

It depends where you are going (within-NSW, or interstate), and what category of research you are undertaking.
Note that international travel is still paused, except within the Australia-New Zealand travel bubble – see end of document.
Within-NSW off-campus research

For off-campus research **within-NSW** that falls **within research categories 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6** pre-COVID application and approvals processes and authority apply. These approvals are **processed within Departments**.

For off-campus research **within-NSW** that falls **within research category 5 (at risk populations)**, researchers should complete their application and Risk Assessment and submit this to the **Associate Dean Research**. This will be forwarded to the DVCR and MQ COVIDSafe for consideration.

Additional notes for applicants and approvers:
For off-campus research in category 3) **Human participant (organisations)**, research planning should at least include the four lines of defence and also follow the “house rules” of the relevant organisation. If MQ’s risk status is lower than the organisation’s, then the higher level of risk mitigation must be followed, including a letter/email from the organisation inviting the researcher and details of COVID planning.

For off campus research in category 4) **Human participant (private individuals)**, research planning should include the four lines of defence and any other reasonable accommodations requested by participants. Approving authorities must ensure the low risk COVIDSafe requirements are met.

Interstate off-campus research

For **ALL** off campus research **interstate**, no matter what category, approval sits with the Executive Dean/Associate Dean Research. A revised application form (low-risk) has been produced for use. The form is available on the FSE intranet.

Applications should be sent to your **HoD** and **Department Manager/Fieldwork Manager** who will forward to the **Associate Dean Research**.

For these applications, researchers must include a comprehensive emergency response and contingency plan that addresses a range of possible scenarios that could occur at both the departing and arriving locations/States. This should include plans for dealing with scenarios that may happen quickly such as:
- changes in circumstances at departing and arriving locations/States (e.g. cluster or hotspot declared)
- border closures
- quarantine or isolation restrictions

What if I plan to travel to a high risk destination (e.g. due to a recent outbreak or hotspot declaration) either within-NSW or interstate?

Contact the **Associate Dean Research** for advice as soon as possible.

What if I plan to travel within the Australia-New Zealand travel bubble?

Contact the **Associate Dean Research** for advice as soon as possible.