



**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**  
**Faculty of Health Sciences**  
**Human Research Ethics Committee**



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6<sup>th</sup> July 2020

Dear Heads of Departments, Department Research Committees, Researchers, Postgraduate Students and Members of the Research Community

**FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HREC):  
UPDATED GUIDANCE FOR RESEARCH STUDIES AND RESEARCH SITES INVOLVING  
HUMANS DURING COVID-19**

The HREC has been receiving numerous requests regarding the recommencement of research activities. Importantly, the Faculty of Health Sciences Research Task Team are working to finalise details regarding return to research plans for staff and postgraduate students.

**Researchers and postgraduate students are reminded that no research involving face-to-face contact during the COVID-19 pandemic may occur without HREC notification and approval. This includes the recommencement of research with current HREC approval. No retrospective recommencement approvals will be granted.**

At present, the only face-to-face research activities that are permitted are prophylactic or therapeutic COVID-19 research, and essential HIV and TB research. The HREC is also continuing to review the recommencement of face-to-face research activities for other therapeutic research studies, where possible, on a case-by-case basis.

Research studies with current HREC approval that do not involve any face-to-face contact (for example, online surveys or retrospective record reviews) may continue without any notification to the HREC.

Researchers conducting retrospective record reviews with current HREC approval must adhere to institutional policies regarding access to records for research purposes during COVID-19. Appropriate safety measures must be in place to limit infection and prevent contamination of documents.

The HREC will continue to accept and review all new protocol applications. Protocol applications must be submitted electronically. Please refer to specific guidance regarding electronic submissions during the national lockdown period, available on the HREC website (<http://www.health.uct.ac.za/fhs/research/humanethics/forms>).

COVID-19 research applications requiring Full Committee review will continue to be considered by a rapid review process. Special Full Committee meetings will continue to be convened to facilitate rapid review of COVID-19 research. Low risk COVID-19 research will be reviewed by the HREC expedited review process. COVID-19 research applications must also adhere to the requirements of the Faculty of Health Sciences Occupational Health and Safety Committee and the Biosafety Committee, as appropriate.

**A responsible and ethical approach to research involving human participants is required in the context of COVID-19. Limiting infections, preventing transmission, and protecting research participants, their communities, and research staff and students should be the priority.**

**Yours sincerely**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Blockman', is written over a light blue rectangular background. Below the signature is a solid black horizontal line.

**PROFESSOR M BLOCKMAN**  
**CHAIRPERSON, FHS HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**