

Information Letter:

COVID-19 Risks and Contact Tracing for In-Person Research Studies

With the global COVID-19 pandemic, Canadian public health authorities have strongly recommended that everyone (especially individuals at high risk or in contact with individuals at high risk) avoid visiting certain businesses and workplaces, and take additional precautions including those outlined in this letter. The Government of Nova Scotia declared a province-wide state of emergency under *The Emergency Management Act* on March 22, 2020 to protect the health and safety of all Nova Scotians and to reduce the spread of the novel coronavirus (or **COVID-19**). COVID-19 is easily spread by contact by people who have the virus. Please read the following statements carefully and feel free to contact the research team with any questions.

Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU), which is under the jurisdiction of Nova Scotia Public Health, has put in place measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19, however MSVU cannot guarantee that any individual attending the MSVU campus, using MSVU facilities, or participating in activities organized by MSVU, whether on-campus or off-campus will not become infected with COVID-19. Further, attending the MSVU campus and participating in MSVU activities, could increase the risk of contracting COVID-19. We ask that you follow relevant local public health directives for the safety of participants, researchers, and the broader community. COVID-19 can result in severe illness, medical expenses, loss of income and in severe cases, death. If you are feeling unwell or experiencing **any** potential COVID-19 symptoms, please stay home and notify a member of the research team that you cannot attend.

Self-Screening

COVID-19 infection can result in severe illness (present and future), medical expenses, loss of income and death. Potential COVID-19 symptoms can vary but may include include, but are not limited to: cough, fever, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, runny nose, stuffy nose, sore throat, painful swallowing, headache, chills, muscle or joint aches, feeling unwell in general, new fatigue or severe exhaustion, gastrointestinal symptoms (e.g., nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or unexplained loss of appetite), loss of sense of smell or taste, or pink eye. The list of symptoms noted above is constantly evolving, and research participants should monitor the most current information from the Government of Nova Scotia at the following link: <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/when-to-seek-help/#symptoms> . The government of Canada provides [information on COVID-19 risks and prevention](#) and on taking care of your [mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

Safety Procedures for Participants

We ask that you follow Nova Scotia Public Health directives, as well, for the safety of participants and researchers. Because you are coming to the MSVU campus, and the researcher may need to be closer to you than the recommended 2 metre distance, the following safety protocols must be followed:

- The day before your visit, a member of the research team will contact you to answer questions for a required COVID-19 screening assessment.
- On the day of your visit, a researcher will conduct the screening again at the building entrance, before escorting you to the study location.
- Please wash or sanitize your hands upon arrival. Hand sanitizer will be provided.
- Please wear a mask or face covering. Masks will be provided if you lack one.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Avoid physical contact with other individuals to the extent possible.
- Advise a researcher as soon as possible if you believe a safety measure is not being taken, or that your safety is at risk.
- If taking public transit for this visit, please follow all [guidelines](#) from the transit service and public health, such as face masking/covering and hand sanitizing.
- Consider using the washroom before leaving home. Notify the researcher of any washroom needs; washroom capacity is limited to allow physical distancing.
- Provide your personal contact information for contact-tracing purposes.

- Attend the study visit alone, or, if needed, bring only one support person/parent. The support person must also follow the protocols outlined above.

We will be collecting your personal contact information, which we must keep for one year, and will use this information only to follow up with you or support contact tracing if you (or your support person) may have been exposed to COVID-19 at the research site. Contact information will be stored securely and separately from research data.

What MSVU is Doing to Reduce Risk

To reduce the possibility of COVID-19 exposure, especially if study procedures cannot maintain 2-metre distancing, we have implemented the following safety procedures recommended by our Safety Office and public health:

- regular handwashing and use of gloves by all research team members,
- availability and use of hand sanitizer for study participants and researchers,
- sanitizing of high-touch surfaces and shared equipment,
- increased cleaning of washrooms and other shared spaces,
- scheduling and limits to reduce occupancy in buildings and laboratories,
- floor markings and signage to encourage physical distancing in shared spaces,
- wearing of face masks/face coverings, and
- where necessary, use of face shields, lab coats, goggles, and plexiglass barriers.

Please do everything you can to follow these health-related procedures and directives, to protect yourself and others.

If you feel that you are unable to wear a mask or are from a vulnerable group with respect to COVID-19 (e.g., an older adult; underlying medical conditions such as heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, cancer, etc.; or a compromised immune system), please discuss your participation with the research team before consenting. You are under no obligation to participate and there are no consequences to you if you change your mind about participating in the research.

Confirmation Statement:

You are invited to attend in-person research study visit(s) on a voluntary basis. You are under no obligation to attend, and at any time you can change your mind, stop participating or withdraw from the study by notifying the researcher. If you have any questions about the study, please contact the research team.

By submitting this form, you confirm that you understand and acknowledge the information above about risks of COVID-19 exposure and related safety measures and that you are willing to come to the research site for in-person research study visit(s). You are not waiving your rights or releasing the investigator(s) or any institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

You will be asked to reconfirm this information and provide your contact information for contact tracing purposes each time you attend an in-person research study visit.

Please save and keep a copy of this information for your own files. You will be asked to reconfirm this information and provide your contact information for contact tracing purposes each time you attend an in-person research study visit.

Print name of participant/support person: _____

Signature of participant/support person: _____

Date: _____

Information for Contact Tracing Participants:

MSVU has taken a comprehensive approach to assist Public Health in their contact tracing in the event of an identified positive case of COVID-19 on our campus or at an MSVU-sanctioned activity in an off-campus location. Safeguarding the health and safety of MSVU students, faculty, and staff as well as the broader community is a top priority.

MSVU's contact tracing role is about ensuring that we have ready access to contact information in the event that it is required for release to Public Health in relation to communicable disease investigation.

In order to assist a public health unit in the event that an individual who has an identified positive case of COVID-19 has been on MSVU's campus or at an MSVU event and was in close proximity to other students, staff, faculty, or community members, MSVU will work with the public health unit to provide them with contact information regarding those who may have been exposed. This will only be provided to a public health unit in the form of the individual's name, phone number, and email address. This could mean providing a list of students in a class, those working in a research lab, students in residence, participants in a research study, or staff/faculty engaged in recreational activities who may have been exposed to the virus. The information will be given to the contact tracer at a public health unit through a secure method. The public health unit will then contact the individuals who may have been exposed as per Nova Scotia Public Health.

Print Name (required):	
Telephone Number (required): <i>Include area code.</i>	
Email Address (optional):	
Date:	
Location of Research Study Visit	

*Please note that the information that you provide in this document:

- will not be stored with the research team or with study data;
- will be sent directly to, and securely stored, with the MSVU Research Office, accessible by the Associate Vice-President Research and the Research Ethics Coordinator;
- will be used only if required by Public Health to provide this personal information for COVID-19 contact tracing purposes, and;
- will be held for a period of one year, after which the information will be securely destroyed.

Acknowledgement The MSVU University Research Ethics Board has adapted this information letter from several Canadian university examples and wishes to extend its appreciation to the Research Ethics Boards at Brock University and the University of Waterloo.