

Standard Operating Procedure

SOP File #	REB.SOP.502
Title	REB Review During Publicly Declared Emergencies
Effective Date	September 1, 2021
Next Review	2026
Next Administrative Review	2023

1. Purpose

This standard operating procedure (SOP) describes the research ethics review procedures during a publicly declared emergency.

2. Definitions

See the MSVU **REB Glossary of Terms (REB.INFO.001)**

Publicly Declared Emergency - For the purpose of this procedure, a publicly declared emergency is an emergency situationsuch as a public health outbreak or natural disaster that has been proclaimed by an authorized public official (Federal, Provincial or Municipal) in accordance with legislation and/or public policy. During such an event, the nature of the emergency may render research participants, researchers, and institutions more vulnerable than under normal circumstances. Consequently, the UREB may temporarily follow modified procedures and practices to review new and ongoing research while ensuring that that research is conducted in accordance with the core ethical principles of the TCPS - Respect for Persons, Concern forWelfare and Justice.

3. Scope

This SOP pertains to Research Ethics Boards (REB) that review human participant research in compliance with applicable policies and guidelines.

4. Responsibilities

All REB members, REB Office Personnel and Organizational Official(s) are responsible for ensuring that the requirements of this SOP are met.

5. Procedures and/or Specific Policies

A publicly declared emergency is an emergency situation, that, due to the extraordinary risks it presents, has been proclaimed as such by an authorized public official in accordance with legislation and/or public policy. Publicly declared emergencies arise suddenly or unexpectedly and require urgent or quick responses. Examples include natural disasters, large communicable disease outbreaks, environmental disasters and humanitarian emergencies. Such emergencies may represent significant risks for research participants in ongoing research or in new research initiated as a result of the emergency. Potential research participants who may not normally be

considered vulnerable may become so by the very nature of the public emergencies, while those already vulnerable may become acutely so.

During publicly declared emergencies, the REB must have established procedures to continue to provide the necessary research ethics oversight. Research ethics review during publicly declared emergencies may necessitate the use of innovative practices. Depending upon the nature of the emergency, for example, REBs might not be able to meet in person, and delegated review procedures may have to be designed to respond to either urgent opportunities for new research or to current ongoing research. The existence of an emergency does not override established procedures to protect the welfare of research participants. Any relaxation of the usual procedural requirements for review should be proportionate to the complexity and urgency of the emergency, as well as to the risks posed by the research under review. Any modifications that are made in the application of research ethics policies and procedures during a publicly declared emergency must be documented and appropriately justified.

5.1. Determining Scope of Emergency

- 5.1.1. Subsequent to an officially publicly declared emergency, the REB Chair or designee will assess the scope of the emergency with respect to:
 - potential and current participants as individuals and communities,
 - Researchers,
 - REB members,
 - Organizational infrastructure, and
 - research ethics review procedures;
- 5.1.2. Determining the scope of the emergency may involve consultation with Organizational Officials and other Organizational representatives, Researchers, REB members and REB Office personnel;
- 5.1.3. Scope of the emergency may assist the REB Chair or designee in determining the level of impact;

5.2. Determining the Level of Impact

- 5.2.1. Subsequent to a publicly declared emergency, the REB Chair or designee will assess the level of impact on the research ethics review procedures. The assessment will consider factors including (but not limited to):
 - Whether the publicly declared emergency affects some or all of the research reviewed by the REB, including:
 - The review of ongoing research that is unrelated to or not arising from the publicly declared emergency,
 - The review of new research that is unrelated to or not arising from the publicly declared emergency, and
 - The review of research that arises from or is related to the publicly declared emergency,
 - The nature of the risks imposed by the publicly declared emergency on research participants, communities, the REB, REB Office personnel and the Organization,
 - Potential impact on Organizational resources or infrastructure (e.g., online systems, electricity, access to buildings),

- What research is considered “essential” during the emergency, and
 - The potential duration of any alterations in review procedures, if predictable;
- 5.2.2. There are three levels of impact that may influence how ethics review will be conducted during the publicly declared emergency:
- **Mild** – little or no impact,
 - **Moderate** – some impact; decisions to proceed at the discretion of the Chair or designee, in consultation with the Researcher, as necessary,
 - **Severe** – extremely debilitating to normal research ethics review procedures;
- 5.2.3. The REB Chair or designee will use the scope of emergency and level of impact to guide the review of research submissions during the publicly declared emergency;
- 5.2.4. Pending the determination of the level of impact on the review of ongoing or new research, the currently established ethics review procedures should be followed.

5.3. Emergency Preparedness Procedures

- 5.3.1. Subsequent to an officially publicly declared emergency, the ability for standard ethics review procedures will be evaluated by the REB Chair or designee and REB Office personnel. Temporary ethics review procedures may be instituted, if necessary;
- 5.3.2. When the impact on ethics review procedures is deemed to be severe and the scope to include members of the REB, teleconferences or videoconferences may be used to conduct REB meetings;
- 5.3.3. When the impact on the ethics review processes is deemed to be severe, the REB Office Personnel may conduct their activities remotely, if it is possible to do so (via online access, remote access to email, mobile phone, etc.), with minimal disruption of services;
- 5.3.4. If the impact is deemed severe, the scope includes members of the REB and teleconferencing, videoconferencing or online access are not available, an REB subcommittee may be established for the duration of the publicly declared emergency;
- 5.3.5. The REB subcommittee composition should be in accordance with the standard REB membership requirements and should include at least five members drawn from the existing REB membership;
- 5.3.6. The current REB Chair or designee should serve as the Chair of the REB subcommittee;
- 5.3.7. At their discretion, the REB subcommittee Chair or designee may invite individuals with expertise in special areas to assist in the review of issues that require expertise beyond that available to the REB subcommittee; however, ad hoc advisors may not contribute directly to the subcommittee’s decision and their presence shall not be used in establishing a quorum;
- 5.3.8. When the impact is deemed to be severe, the REB Chair or designee may defer the ethics review and research oversight of new and ongoing research to another REB, subject to the applicable policies and agreements;
- 5.3.9. Where research submissions are deemed to be more than minimal risk and subject to applicable regulations, the REB Chair or subcommittee Chair or designee will use their judgement in determining the type of review required

- (delegated or Full Board), taking into account the scope and severity of the impact of the emergency and the complexity and urgency of the submission;
- 5.3.10. Any modifications that are made in the application of research ethics policies and procedures during a publicly declared emergency must be documented and appropriately justified;
 - 5.3.11. The REB Chair or designee should periodically assess the impact of the emergency on the ethics review procedures and adjust any temporary ethics review procedures accordingly;
 - 5.3.12. Any modifications that are made in the application of research ethics policies and procedures during a publicly declared emergency will cease as soon as is feasible after the emergency has officially ended (i.e., as declared by an authorized public official). The REB Chair or designee will determine when to resume routine ethics review procedures;
 - 5.3.13. All delegated approvals of research following a publicly declared emergency must be assessed to determine if subsequent Full Board review is required at the first opportunity subsequent to the cessation of the publicly declared emergency;
 - 5.3.14. At the conclusion of the publicly declared emergency, the REB Chair or designee and the REB Office Personnel should work with the REB subcommittee members to evaluate the effectiveness of its declared emergency procedures and to make recommendations for improvements.

5.4. **Review of Ongoing Research NOT Related to or Arising from the Publicly Declared Emergency**

- 5.4.1. When the impact of the publicly declared emergency on ethics review is determined to be mild to moderate, the following will apply to the review of ongoing research:
 - The REB Chair or designee will determine if the scope of the emergency may include the research participants as individuals or as part of a community,
 - The REB Chair or designee will determine if the research needs to continue, or if it can be postponed until after the emergency is over,
 - The research may continue at the discretion of the REB Chair or designee in consultation with the Researcher, as necessary,
 - Researcher's response to REB reviews, major amendments, and unanticipated and adverse events will be prioritized for review,
 - Continuing reviews will receive the next priority for review, followed by research completion reports,
 - Other submissions will be reviewed as time allows;
- 5.4.2. When the impact of the publicly declared emergency on ethics review is determined to be severe, the following will apply to the review of ongoing research:
 - Research activities not involving, or no longer involving, recruitment or direct contact with participants may continue,
 - Research activities involving recruitment or direct contact with participants may only continue if ceasing such activity might pose significant risks to participant safety,

- Major amendments and unanticipated or adverse event reports related to these studies will be reviewed by the REB subcommittee or the REB subcommittee Chair or designee, as appropriate;
- 5.4.3. At the REB Chair or designee’s discretion, and subject to applicable policies, review procedures may be delayed or temporarily suspended depending upon volume. In such cases, research shall be deemed to have continuing approval until such time that the REB is able to conduct its review.
- 5.5. Review of New Research NOT Related to or Arising from the Publicly Declared Emergency**
- 5.5.1. When the scope of the emergency is contained and impact of the publicly declared emergency on ethics review is determined to be mild to moderate, the REB Chair or designee will determine whether review of any new research not related to the publicly declared emergency may proceed or will be postponed until after the emergency is over;
- 5.5.2. When the scope of the emergency is large or uncontained and the impact of the publicly declared emergency on ethics review procedures is determined to be severe, any new research not related to the publicly declared emergency will not be reviewed until the emergency is declared to be over.
- 5.6. Review of Research RELATED to or Arising from the Publicly Declared Emergency**
- 5.6.1. Researchers whose research focuses on publicly declared emergencies are encouraged to submit general protocols for conditional approval prior to emergencies to facilitate time-imperative REB approval;
- 5.6.2. If a request to review research related to a publicly declared emergency is received, it will be directed to the REB Chair or REB subcommittee Chair or designee, as applicable;
- 5.6.3. The REB Chair or designee will assess the risks associated with the proposed research, as well as aspects of the research that might require enhanced scrutiny or diligence, considering the scope of the emergency and severity of the impact on ethics review procedures;
- 5.6.4. When the impact of the publicly declared emergency on ethics reviews is determined to be mild to moderate, research related to the publicly declared emergency has priority for review;
- 5.6.5. When the impact of the publicly declared emergency on ethics review is determined to be severe, time-sensitive review processes may be followed, such as delegated review as appropriate, review by an REB subcommittee, and/or meetings conducted via teleconference or videoconference. These alterations may be limited to the review of the research related to the publicly declared emergency;
- 5.6.6. The REB may implement any/all the emergency preparedness procedures as deemed appropriate to the research/emergency.

6. References

See References listed (if applicable)

7. Acknowledgements

The development of this document has benefited directly from similar documents made public by the Tri-Council, as well as several Canadian universities. In some instances, specific formulations drawn from these sources have been incorporated into this document. Specific iterations were drawn from the following:

- Standard Operating Procedures for Observational Health and Non-Clinical Trial Research Ethics Boards - [N2/CAREB-ACCER REB SOPs – Canadian Association of Research Ethics Boards](#) (retrieved July 2021)
- N2/CAREB-ACCER REB SOPs - N2 Network of Networks - [Resources - N2 Canada](#) (retrieved July 2021)

8. SOP History

SOP Number	Key Changes	Effective Date
REB.SOP.501	SOP renumbered. Previous version (REB.SOP.104 - 2014) retired and replaced with N2/CAREB harmonized SOP	September 1, 2021
REB.SOP.104	Original Version	January 2014