Biomedical Imaging Center

Covid-19 Policies
University Operations Research Level 2

In accordance with the step-down in University Operations from Research Level 3A to Level 2 on 19 April 2021, the Biomedical Imaging Center (BIC) will continue to support Human Subjects Research in Tiers A, B, and C. Research Restart guidelines established by the Office of the Vice President for Research must be followed, and BIC has established the following policies for operation at Research Level 2.

With the projected switches to Level 1 (on 17 May 2021) and Level 0 (on 5 July 2021), Tier D Human Subjects Research may resume once Operations Level 1 is attained.

1) Information for Resuming Research Operations on Campus can be found on the website of the Office of the Vice President for Research (Research Restart)

- Human Subjects Research in Tiers A, B, and C will be permitted with approval from the ADR (or equivalent) of your CSU and current IRB approval.
- We recommend that all researchers undertake refresher Level 1 safety training prior to resuming their studies (details below).
- Contact BIC at support@biomedimaging.utexas.edu for approval to resume using BIC facilities. Include your ADR approval document and any other required documentation with your application. Please ensure you have all necessary approvals and that online L1 refresher training has been completed prior to contacting BIC.
- Double-check all MRI protocols and ancillary hardware before scanning a participant.

2) Updated Training Procedures

- BIC will resume training of new users at both Level 1 (L1) and Level 2 (L2).
- L1 and L2 training will be offered as a mixture of online and in-person sessions.
- L1 training is available via UTLearn (OH 309 or OH 310). Please use these online courses to train new lab members or complete refresher training.
- L2 trained lab personnel may conduct facility walk-throughs / familiarization with BIC equipment once online training has been completed.
- Key L1 safety training will occur in-person in small lab-group classes on the appropriate system. Vida safety training classes will be on Mondays at 4:00-4:30pm and 4:30-5:00pm, and Skyra safety training classes will be on Tuesdays at 4:00-4:30pm and 4:30-5:00pm. Once your entire lab-group has completed the online training component, contact BIC at support@biomedimaging.utexas.edu to schedule a class. Places will be available to labs on a first-come, first-served basis.
- L2 training will be offered via a virtual class, and an in-person practical session. Apprenticeship sessions and the written and in-person exams will remain in place. Contact BIC at support@biomedimaging.utexas.edu to schedule L2 training.
3) Participant Health Screening.

- Please health-screen participants prior to and at the time of their research visit.
- Health screening forms are available at this link (COVID-19 Symptom Survey).
- To augment our safety procedures a temperature check has been added to the health-screening process. Digital infrared thermometers will be available for your use at both NHB and HDB facilities.
- If, during the initial pre-visit health-screening, an individual responds “yes” to any of the questions, please do not schedule them for a visit.
- Participants should also complete the health-screening form on the day of their visit along with the MRI screening form via the RedCap/Qualtrics portals. If an individual answers “yes” to any question or exhibits a fever of >100.4°F, please discontinue the study visit. Completed health and MRI-screening forms will be archived automatically on the portal.
- An optional COVID-19 History Evaluation has been added to the screening-process to create a Covid-related database of MRI images. Please have your participants complete this form.

4) Researcher Health Screening

- Please screen all research personnel, including performing a temperature check, using the health-screening form before conducting research at BIC facilities.
- If you are ill, exhibit a fever of >100.4°F, or answer “yes” to any of the health screening sessions, please remain at home and cancel your research session.

5) Late cancellation and no-show policy.

- During Research Operations Level 2 users will not be charged for late cancellations or participant no-shows.
- The cancellation policy also applies if a researcher is ill and the session cannot be performed.

6) Lab-space density / social-distancing requirements.

- Researchers must continue to adhere to a density of 1 person per 125 sq. ft. of research space when using BIC facilities.
- When within the same research space maintain 6’ social distance whenever possible and minimize the duration of close (within 6’) contact.
- Individuals from within the same household (e.g. family members of the study participant) may wait in the same room without person-density or social-distancing constraints but must remain masked.
- When possible, use the largest available room(s) for testing and other procedures while you are in the BIC areas. The conference rooms permit better social distancing than the smaller procedural rooms and can be scheduled using FBS.
- Please continue to use the Protect Texas Together app to log your time in BIC facilities.
7) Updated scanning guidelines.

- **Prohibited Subjects**: Individuals who are currently COVID-19 positive, or who do not pass the health-screening checklist. All other individuals may be scanned if your research falls within the Tier Levels corresponding to the current University Operations Research Level.
- Metal-free masks for MRI scan participants will be provided by the BIC and must be worn in the vicinity of the MRI scanners.
- Researchers may use their own masks, if previously determined to be MR safe.
- Scanning procedures will remain identical to current COVID-19 protocols until the participant is alone in the scanner room.
- All individuals (research participant and research team) should wash their hands immediately before entering the scanner room or interacting with the mock scanner. Researchers should don latex gloves before interacting with the MRI scanner or mock scanner and when placing participants in the scanner. You will need to screen your participants for latex sensitivity prior to the scanning session. If you or your participant has a latex sensitivity, please email support@biomedimaging.utexas.edu for additional guidance.
- Once the participant is positioned in the scanner and the operator/technician has vacated the scanner room, the participant can be instructed via intercom to lower their mask below the chin. Once scanning is complete instruct the participant to replace their face mask over their nose and mouth prior to the operator/technician reentering the scanner room.
- For all subsequent interactions with the participant and until the system has been thoroughly cleaned / disinfected, the operator / technician will wear enhanced PPE (N95 grade mask, gloves). We request that PIs provide N-95 masks for any research staff performing post-scan disinfection procedures. BIC will maintain a supplementary stock of N-95 masks for research use, if necessary.
- Do not reuse sheets or blankets. After a single use, please place all used linen in the laundry.

This updated procedure to adopt mask-less scanning is based on a risk / benefit assessment.

**Risk**: Per the Categories of Risk to Inform Decision-making about Human Subjects Research of the VPR’s Research Restart Plan, the Risk of COVID transmission when the participant is alone is low. Allowing the participant to lower their mask in the scanner room once alone is also consistent with UT guidelines which permit workers to be mask-less when alone in their office. The risks to the researcher / technician performing the study remain constant prior to and after the scanning procedure.

To date there have been no known cases of COVID-19 transmission during scans on the MRI or PET/MR scanners at the BIC. Current cleaning and disinfection procedures have thus far been effective at preventing COVID-19 transmission. Current rates of air-exchange within the scanner room are 900 cfm - the enhanced HVAC capacity in these areas results in full air turnover every ~7.5 minutes which significantly exceeds the rates necessary to remove airborne aerosols from within the room and the scanner bore during the cleaning period.

**Benefit**: Recent evidence indicates that wearing a mask during functional MRI (fMRI) scanning may affect the consistency, variability, and reproducibility of the acquired data. Furthermore, wearing a mask may exacerbate the stress and claustrophobia participants often experience.
during scanning, particularly in susceptible individuals (e.g., children, participants with anxiety or other stress disorders).

University Operations Research Level 2 permits research to be performed in Tiers A-C, which includes Low- through High-Risk Scenarios. Based on our risk / benefit assessment we conclude that maskless scanning falls within these Tiers.

8) Updated booking guidelines.

- Between-scan time has been reduced to a 30min period due to the rapid air exchange within the MRI scanner rooms. The enhanced HVAC capacity in these areas results in full air turnover every ~7.5 minutes (~4 per 30 min period).
- In combination with our stringent cleaning / disinfection procedures and researcher safety protocols, this 30min period is sufficient to minimize potential contamination.
- On the 3T Skyra system, FBS will automatically block the scanner for 30 minutes after each reservation.
- On the 3T Vida system, continue to book an additional 30min period following your session and specify that the Resource Use is for “System Cleaning”.
- You will not be charged for this additional 30min of cleaning /disinfection time.
- Please ensure you book additional time in testing / procedural / conference rooms to account for cleaning / disinfection.
- System status and equipment outages can be viewed at Alerts and Outages.

9) Cleaning and disinfection procedures.

- Enhanced disinfection and cleaning procedures remain in place for all BIC facilities and equipment. It is important that all shared equipment and hard surfaces in common areas be disinfected between usages.
- General guidelines can be found on the BIC Wiki (BIC Disinfection Protocols).
- Detailed disinfection procedures are available in BIC facilities and at the following links for the Skyra, Vida, and pre-clinical systems.
- Disinfection procedures for communal waiting areas can be found here.
- Please continue to follow equivalent procedures for other BIC facilities, including the mock scanner, and all testing/patient procedure rooms.
- At the end of your experimental session, please complete the Disinfection Checklist to document adherence to the disinfection and cleaning protocols.

10) Avoid unnecessary contact.

- Only enter communal areas or rooms within the BIC facilities that you have booked for your session.
- To minimize contact with hard surfaces, we ask that you leave the lights on in all rooms within the BIC to avoid unnecessary contact with the light switches.

We will continue to communicate further updates and policy changes through the BIC list-serve and our website.

If you have any questions regarding current COVID-19 policies in BIC, please email support@biomedimaging.utexas.edu, and we will respond promptly.