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COMMUNIQUE: NO 8

**UPDATE TO RESTRICTED CONTINUATION OF RESEARCH DURING ALERT LEVEL TWO OF
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

1 September 2020

Dear Researchers, Staff and Students

We hope that this communique finds you and your loved ones healthy and safe during these troubled times. This communique is being sent in response to the changed **Alert Level 2** of the National Lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As was indicated in **Communique 6**, the *continuation of research* during this time has to be *well-managed* and has to be undertaken in a *careful and measured* manner, based on the types of research being undertaken, to ensure the protection of the *participants*, the *researchers* and the *university* as a whole.

Note: Please read Communique 6 together with Communique 8.

The following system still remains in place:

- a. For existing studies that were *put on hold* due to a specific prior Alert Level, **permission to resume** has to first be obtained from the FHS Ethics Office to ensure that COVID-19 research risk assessment and management processes have been integrated into the project before it is allowed to resume (which will be handled in an expedited manner).
- b. If a study is to be approved, It will be clearly indicated in writing i.e. in the approval letter, by the aforementioned research ethics committees (RECs), whether a research study can *begin in its present format* (if COVID-19 research risk assessment and management processes were integrated into the planning) or if it can only be undertaken during a future alert level.
- c. If a study is in the process of initial review. It will be clearly indicated in writing i.e. in the reviewer reports during the approval process, what would have to be done before the research study could proceed, if COVID-19 research risk assessment and management processes were not included.
- d. It will also be clearly indicated in writing, during the passive monitoring process, i.e. in the monitoring feedback letter by the aforementioned RECs, whether a research study could resume or if the study should remain *on hold*, due to a specific alert level. In the latter case, **permission to resume** has to first be obtained from the FHS's Ethics Office to ensure that COVID-19 research risk assessment and management processes have been integrated into the study, before the study can be resumed.

As previously stated, the decision of which studies **will** be allowed to proceed, and which studies **will not** be allowed to proceed, is based on the *types of studies permitted during a specific alert level's*

regulations and the NWU directives for the specific level specified by either the DVC: Research and Innovation or the Deputy Dean: Research and Innovation.

The attached document entitled “**Alert Levels and Research (Version 2)**” has been updated based on the move to Alert Level 2 and the concomitant changes in the governmental directives related to this move, as well as discussions with the DVC: Research and Innovation and the Deputy Dean: Research and Innovation, to provide researchers, staff and students with the necessary guidance to proceed with research under this new Alert Level.

The types of studies as mentioned in previous communiques can still continue, as well as the following further types of studies which will now be allowed under Alert Level 2 (indicated in bold):

- a. **Restricted research that requires physical human participant interaction in close proximity, in a participant’s home. NB: There may not be more than 2 researchers present during this type of research and it must be conducted under strict precautionary measures (set out in the document “COVID-19 research risk assessment and management approach – Version 2 (Greeff, 17 July 2020).**
- b. **Restricted research that requires physical human participant interaction in close proximity, for the purpose of any type of group work e.g. focus group discussions, in community facilities e.g. church hall, community centre etc. NB: There may not be more than 2 researchers and 8 participants present during this type of research and it must be conducted under strict precautionary measures (set out in the document “COVID-19 research risk assessment and management approach – Version 2 (Greeff, 17 July 2020).**
- c. All laboratory work (including work with animals or previously collected human samples), where the appropriate safety measures have been implemented according to the North-West University COVID-19 Occupational Health and Safety Standard Operating Procedure.
- d. Studies that undertake data gathering with human participants via email, telephone or an online platform.
- e. Studies that collect data via online questionnaires or surveys.
- f. Studies that only make use of previously-collected data, where there is no contact with human participants.

The followings types of studies are however, still placed on hold (even if the study has been previously approved), until the appropriate Alert Level at which the study can proceed is reached:

- a. Any research that is undertaken in any governmental facilities e.g. correctional centres, health establishments, educational facilities such as school or universities, as well as older persons’ residential facilities.
- b. Research where participants have to come to the University, as no participants are currently allowed on any campus or at any university facility.

Important Note:

Please read this communique together with:

- Communique 6
- The attached two documents:
 - “COVID-19 Research Risk Assessment and Management Approach (Version 2) by Greeff (17 July 2020)
 - “Implications of Alert Levels for Researchers and Postgraduate Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic (Version 2)” by Greeff (20 August 2020).

Issued by: The Head of the Ethics Office, Chairpersons of NWU-HREC and NWU-AnimCareREC and research ethics advisor