

COVID-19 Re-opening Plan – Summer 2020

Last updated July 7, 2020

The Vector Institute is committed to taking a thoughtful and transparent approach as we plan to re-open limited access to the Vector suite at 661 University Avenue in the MaRS Centre, West Tower.

[This limited re-opening will be effective Monday July 13, 2020.](#)

The intent of this document is to summarize current access plans, which will continue to evolve over time and change based on guidance provided by government orders, public health authorities, the MaRS Centre (home to the Vector Institute), and the University of Toronto (Vector's most closely-affiliated university).

Additional resources and instructions will be provided as they become available. The most current version of this document will also be posted on Vector's COVID-19 webpage at: <https://vectorinstitute.ai/covid-19-updates/>

Status and Timelines

University of Toronto, Government of Ontario, and MaRS Centre

As a research institute located adjacent to the University of Toronto, the university's plans have influenced Vector's plans.

The University of Toronto released its plan (<https://www.provost.utoronto.ca/planning-policy/utogether2020-a-roadmap-for-the-university-of-toronto/>) on May 21, 2020, which describe plans for Fall 2020 that include "...a diverse set of courses and course activities in line with program and degree requirements, including offering remote and in-person opportunities for labs, seminars and studios, as well as internships and co-ops in the community."

Vector has also reviewed the Ontario Government's *Framework for Reopening our Province* (<https://files.ontario.ca/mof-framework-for-reopening-our-province-en-2020-04-27.pdf>), and the Vector Institute is currently operating remotely as an essential workplace.

The Vector Institute has also received the Return to Work plan developed by MaRS Centre, which describes their reopening plans including descriptions for common areas, HVAC systems, and other building amenities, services, and systems e.g., access entrances, building elevators, and janitorial services.

Vector Institute Plan

As part of planning for faculty and students returning to campus in at least some form in Fall 2020, Vector will re-open its offices under limited conditions effective Monday July 13, 2020.

These limited conditions include access restrictions that have been implemented by the MaRS Centre, changes in procedures, and physical distancing measures.

Professional staff and Vector researchers granted access to return to Vector generally fall into one of the following categories, which were eligible for consideration to return as part of the early stages of this gradual re-opening:

- those whose position requires on-site presence for either business continuity or health and safety reasons;
- those who have experienced a significant productivity loss in a work-from-home arrangement; or,
- those experiencing difficulty with work-from-home conditions e.g., loneliness, mental distress, or stress due to containment.

It was previously communicated that access decisions would be based on the availability of workstations, capacity restrictions, guidance from public health authorities and the MaRS Centre with the primary goal of protecting the health and safety of all members of the Vector community—we are pleased to announce that limited access will be granted to all those who had requested an early return.

All remaining professional staff and researchers will continue under work-from-home arrangements through to at least **September 7, 2020**.

In an effort to respect social distancing measures, curb the spread of COVID-19, and preserve the health and safety of all members of the Vector community, **those users not included in the limited number of re-activated access card holders may only gain physical access to the Vector Institute if so approved in advance of the visit by the Office Services Manager.**

Further, notwithstanding the introduction by MaRS Centre of a pre-clearance and check-in system for external visitors, the **Vector Institute will be closed to all non-access card holders and external guests during this time.**

Frequently Asked Questions

Access

Q: Will guests, visitors, or other non-access card holders be granted access to the Vector Institute's offices?

A: Only access card holders may enter the building and the Vector suite in accordance with MaRS guidelines.

External guests may visit the MaRS building if they satisfy MaRS' pre-clearance and check-in system for external visitors. However, the Vector Institute remains closed to all non-access card holders and external guests during this time.

Meetings with external visitors or guests should be conducted electronically or take place in-person outside of the MaRS building, provided that the participants can satisfy public health guidelines and maintain social distancing.

Q: How many members of my team or research lab will be eligible to be in Vector on a given day?

A: Density and occupancy restrictions are based on guidance provided by government orders, public health authorities, and the MaRS Centre.

The maximum number of individuals permitted to occupy one multi-purpose room simultaneously is four, but multiple MPRs combined may be able to accommodate a larger meeting.

More generally, you should expect that not all members of a staff team or lab group will be eligible for access at any given time and that large group meetings (i.e., meetings of four individuals or more) should continue to be conducted electronically or take place in-person outside of the MaRS building provided that the participants can satisfy public health guidelines and maintain social distancing.

Q: Does the City's new by-law on mandatory mask usage apply to Vector?

A: No.

The City of Toronto recently passed by-law 541-2020, which requires the use of a face mask in enclosed public spaces. The by-law became effective on July 7, 2020.

In alignment with this by-law, the MaRS Centre expects that all occupants entering the building will wear a mask or face covering in common areas, including washrooms, elevators, escalators, and other shared spaces.

The access hallways and washrooms on the seventh floor of the West Tower should be considered as common areas for the purposes of this by-law.

In contrast, the Vector Institute is a private facility, not open to the public. Therefore, the municipal by-law 541-2020 does not apply within the Vector Institute itself.

Q. Am I required to wear a face mask in Vector?

A: Yes. The mask policy in Vector is such that one must wear a face mask when travelling to and moving around the office, as social distancing cannot be guaranteed while doing so.

However, one need not wear a face mask only if one is working alone and is able to satisfy public health guidelines and can maintain social distancing.

Put more simply, you must wear a face mask when walking around the office, but if you have six feet of clearance around you while working alone, the face mask can be removed.

Q: Will Vector provide face masks?

A: All personnel are encouraged to acquire and wear their own masks or face coverings for reasons of comfort, fit, and preference.

Vector will provide a supply of face masks intended to accommodate personnel who forget their mask, have a mask damaged while at Vector, or may not yet have been able to acquire their own.

Q: *If I do not request regular access to Vector initially, will I be able to enter the Vector Institute's offices for the purposes of picking up equipment and/or personal belongings for at home use?*

A: Professional staff and Vector Researchers can contact the Office Services Manager to coordinate a time to enter Vector to pick up personal belongings, business resources, or assigned equipment.

Vector equipment can be loaned to both professional staff and Vector researchers under certain conditions. For research labs, there must also be equipment available i.e., Vector does not guarantee that dedicated equipment is available for every individual researcher.

Vector equipment cannot be loaned to non-Vector researchers.

Q: *Will access to Vector continue to be allowed on evenings and weekends?*

A: MaRS Centre's Return to Work plan permits access to the building outside of business hours, and the Vector Institute has approved requests for limited access to Vector during these times if this access was specifically requested by individuals.

Health

Q: *If I am feeling unwell will I be eligible to enter the Vector space?*

A: If you are feeling unwell in any way, regardless of the severity of your symptoms or whether or not your symptoms are recognized symptoms of COVID-19, you should not enter either the MaRS Centre or Vector Institute offices and should comply with all guidance set by public health authorities.

Q: *If I have come into contact with someone who has a presumptive or confirmed case of COVID-19, am I required to notify Vector and/or self-isolate for a period of two weeks?*

A: Should you come into contact with someone with a presumptive or confirmed case of COVID-19, please notify your direct supervisor (who will inform Vector Human Resources) and suspend visitation to the Vector suite immediately.

The duration of your suspension will be based on guidance from public health authorities. Should you test negative for COVID-19 following the contact, you are not displaying symptoms of the virus, and exposure to the individual with the presumptive or confirmed case has not continued, you may be eligible to return to Vector earlier than the recommended public health quarantine period.

Q: *Am I required to notify Vector and/or stay home for a two-week period if I have a presumptive or confirmed case of COVID-19?*

A: Should you be diagnosed with a presumptive or confirmed case of COVID-19, please notify your direct supervisor (who will inform Vector Human Resources) and suspend visitation to the Vector suite immediately.

The duration of your suspension will be based on guidance from public health authorities.

Q: Will I be notified in the event that someone in the Vector space has a confirmed or presumptive case of COVID-19?

A: Yes, a general notice will be shared with all individuals with active access cards to the Vector Institute.

The privacy of the individual will be maintained to the extent that is possible while ensuring we are taking the most appropriate steps to preserve the health and safety of others (e.g., those who work most closely with the individual may be provided additional communication including the dates and times of the individual's recent access).

Q: Will the office be closed in the event that a user has a presumptive or confirmed case of COVID-19?

A: The Vector Institute will work closely with MaRS Centre and follow all public health guidelines in respect of the different situations that may arise.

Part of these guidelines may involve closing the Vector Institute for disinfecting, which may take several days to coordinate and execute.

As the Vector Institute could close at any time without significant notice, you are advised to take essential items home with you on a daily basis.

Should additional public health guidelines regarding organizational response to a presumptive or confirmed case of COVID-19 in a workplace be provided, Vector will comply with these recommendations.

Physical Space

Q: What changes can I expect regarding the layout and use of the Vector space?

A: The Vector Institute has considered several approaches and options and has made decisions intended to preserve the health and safety of all members of the Vector community.

Decisions considered guidance from public health authorities and the MaRS Centre, evaluation of their both real and perceived practicality, cost of implementation, impact to Vector culture, and projected overall effectiveness.

Conditions of access will evolve over time, but the following changes have been enacted in the Vector office:

- Upon arrival in MaRS and the 7th floor, all access card holders are asked to wash their hands before entering the Vector Institute, and use an alcohol-based sanitizer upon entering the suite.
 - Note that hand sanitizer stations are available throughout the MaRS Centre and Vector.
- Public health recommendations on social distancing (e.g., remaining six feet apart at all times and wearing a mask if social distancing is not possible) are being observed and enforced.
- In respecting social distancing guidelines, access to meeting rooms is restricted to the following:
 - Huddle rooms and unassigned private offices – one user at a time; and
 - Hilbert, Banach, Euclidean, or Sobolev spaces – four users at a time, ensuring social distancing requirements are respected.
- All meeting room bookings must be arranged ahead of time, via direct online calendar booking or by contacting the Office Services team. Room booking panels are not be available for walk-up booking use.
- Private offices are restricted for use by the assigned occupant only, unless the occupant is under a work-from-home arrangement and has authorized access to the space.
- VOIP phones have been temporarily removed from huddle rooms.

- Access to common area refrigerators, shared dishes, and the dishwasher has been temporarily suspended.
- Microwaves in both kitchens remain available with users being required to wipe down surfaces before and after use.
- Coffee and tea services have been temporarily suspended.
- Workstation availability has been staggered such that social distancing measures can be respected (i.e., desks that are directly adjacent to one another are off-limits).
- Workstation shuffles and the availability of floating or shared workstations has been temporarily suspended.
- Desks are assigned directly to those individuals that have requested and have been subsequently approved to return to the Vector space.
- The amount of reception/lounge furniture available for use has been reduced.
- All users of the space are required to wipe down public surfaces throughout the day with alcohol-based disinfecting wipes. This requirement includes wiping down your workstation upon arrival into the office and prior to your departure, as well as wiping down any shared spaces immediately following use including desks and doorknobs, meeting rooms, printers, keyboards, and the kitchen counter.
 - Alcohol-based hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes are available in all high traffic areas including printer and meeting rooms.
- Additional and more frequent cleaning and janitorial services are being provided.
- If necessary, more restricted schedules for access may be introduced to help ensure social distancing.

Q: *There have been concerns about airborne infection risks associated with COVID-19; how does air circulation and HVAC within the building work?*

A: The MaRS Centre has made changes to their HVAC systems, including in the Vector Institute suite, that are intended to reduce recirculation of air within the same indoor space:

- MaRS has disabled their CO₂ monitoring system so that fresh air is now constantly flowing into the system. The CO₂ monitoring system otherwise operated as an energy efficiency measure since fresh air was only introduced when CO₂ readings decreased below a certain threshold, which meant less heated or chilled water was required (depending on the season) to treat incoming fresh air. This CO₂ monitoring system will remain disabled until further notice.
- Filtration for air handling units that serve office areas has been increased from a Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) of 10 to MERV 13; the higher filter ratings filter out smaller particles in the air.
- Washroom exhaust fans, which previously would shut off at night as an energy efficiency measure, will now run continuously 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Vector undertakes regular maintenance on its own fan coil filters, which remove particles from the air. As noted above, the air being circulated into the MaRS Centre will constantly have fresh air being added into the system rather than periodically.

Q: *What other protection measures had Vector considered for implementation?*

A: The Vector Institute had considered various additional control measures such as:

- Installation of new, taller, frosted glass dividers between workstations, including an additional barrier at the front desk.
- Installation of thermal cameras, or temperature scanning at all entrances.
- Installation of touch-free door opening mechanisms.
- The requirement for all personnel to wear face masks at all times while in the Vector space.

However, the Vector Institute may implement additional protective measures based on guidance from public health authorities and the MaRS Centre.

Q: *Will a member of the Office Services Team be on site at all times for assistance and questions regarding the physical space?*

A: A member of the Office Services Team will, pending scheduling conflicts and regular breaks, be available at the front desk Monday-Friday during normal business hours.

Should a member of the Office Services Team not be immediately available for support, you can contact them on Slack or speak with another member of the professional staff.

Q: *Can we expect other restrictions within the MaRS building?*

A: Yes. Vector expects to receive regular updates to the guidelines that are made available from MaRS.

Events and Meetings

Q: *Will Vector in-person events resume during this initial access period?*

A: As described in the Ontario Government's *Framework for Reopening our Province*, large public gatherings such as concerts and sporting events continue to be restricted for the foreseeable future.

In the absence of direction to the contrary from public health authorities and the MaRS Centre, large Vector events will continue to be delivered virtually until further notice.

Q: *Can meetings such as reading groups or talks be held in the Vector office?*

A: Meetings can be held within the Vector space so long as they respect the abovementioned measures surrounding social distancing (i.e., all individuals must maintain a distance of six feet from one another), meeting room occupancy (i.e., no more than four users can be in a large meeting room at any one time), and access (i.e., only access card holders are permitted into the space).

Travel and Commuting

Q: *When travel restrictions are lifted, will staff or researchers be eligible to travel for business purposes?*

A: Professional staff of the Vector Institute will be eligible to travel for business-critical purposes only. Approval will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Researchers should look to the guidelines of their home institutions for clarity on travel authorization and procedures e.g., the University of Toronto describes that, "International travel restrictions will likely remain in place for some time. When these restrictions are lifted, there will likely be strict quarantine requirements for those coming to our campuses from abroad, such as international students and new faculty. The University will support travelers to meet these self-isolation requirements."

Q: *Will I be required to quarantine or suspend access to the Vector space following travel?*

A: The Vector Institute will not impose its own instructions separate and apart from government and public health guidelines regarding quarantine guidelines following travel.

Q: *Will professional staff be eligible for reimbursement for parking, Uber, taxi or other ride services that will limit my use of public transit in travelling to and from Vector?*

A: As an organization funded in part by the federal and provincial governments, we are unable to provide perquisites such as reimbursement for travel to and from the Vector Institute except for reasons of public safety after hours.

All members of the Vector community are encouraged to review and adhere to the various guidelines set forth by public health officials and transit authorities to ensure a safe commute.

Note that the TTC, Toronto's public transit system, requires the use of face masks or face coverings when travelling on the TTC subject to limited exceptions effective July 2, 2020.

Compliance and Questions

Q: *Who should I contact regarding questions or concerns surrounding office procedures?*

A: You may contact the point-of-contact most directly accessible to you, which is usually either your direct manager or faculty supervisor. You may also contact the Office Services team, Human Resources team, or the Chief Operations Officer in the event that your direct manager or faculty supervisor is unavailable.

Q: *Is compliance with these new procedures and guidelines mandatory while in the Vector space?*

A: Yes, you are required to comply with all procedures and guidelines set forth in this document as a condition of access to the Vector Institute.

The primary goal of these conditions is protecting the health and safety of all members of the Vector community.

Non-compliance with any of these measures may be met with disciplinary action up to and including temporary loss of access to the Vector space, the end of your term at the Vector Institute and/or dismissal.

Q: *Will there be changes to any of Vector's existing policies and programs (e.g., the Code of Conduct, Health and Safety Policy, Access agreements, or terms of Short-Term Disability)?*

A: A review of applicable Vector policies is ongoing. Any material changes to policies that are applicable to you in your role at the Vector Institute will be shared with you directly.

Resources

Should you require remote scientific computing support please contact a member of the scientific computing team.

If you have questions related to COVID-19, you can contact Telehealth Ontario, which is a free, confidential service that provides health advice and information. Call 1-866-797-0000 or visit <https://www.ontario.ca/page/get-medical-advice-telehealth-ontario> to learn more.

Should you require resources related to your personal or mental health, please contact the Vector Institute's Employee Assistance Plan, which is available to all staff and researchers.

Researchers may also contact their Student Services or Human Resources department at their respective institutions for additional support programs.

Anyone in crisis is encouraged to contact the Crisis Services Canada national line at 1-833-456-4566 or text 45645 (in Quebec, call: 1-866-277-3553) If the risk is immediate, call 9-1-1.

Should you have general questions regarding COVID-19, or Vector's COVID-19 response including ongoing research projects, please visit our dedicated [public web page](#).