NATIONAL HEALTH RESEARCH AUTHORITY

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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Date: 1st July, 2021

To all Researchers, heads of research institutions and research establishments

C.C:
Permanent Secretary Technical Services, Ministry of Health
NHRA Council Chairperson
NHREB Chairperson
Director General, ZNPHI
Chairpersons of all Research Ethics Committees

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Update on temporal suspension of COVID-19 Risky Research Activities

Reference is made to the above captioned subject matter and our circular letter dated 18 June 2021 (attached for reference).

As you are all aware, the COVID-19 epidemiological situation has not improved since we last communicated to you on May 18, 2021. In the light of this, the **temporal suspension of all research activities that involve direct interaction or contact with research participants has been extended and will be reviewed on August 1, 2021.** Research activities that have been authorized to continue after strengthened infection control measures can continue.

Notwithstanding the above authorization however, and for new studies and for those studies whose investigators would like them to continue, the following strengthened measures should be put in place:

1.0 Study specific COVID-19 risk identification, analysis, and mitigation

Principal Investigators should submit to NHRA a short description of risks of exposure to COVID-19 associated with specific studies they are undertaking or intend to undertake as well as specific measures put in place to mitigate those risks. They should also clearly describe systems or mechanisms they have put in place to enforce and monitor compliance to those measures. I am aware that some Principal Investigators have already submitted this; so, they do not need to resubmit.

2.0 Strengthened risk mitigation measures

2.1 For all COVID 19 studies that involve direct exposure with patients or SARS COV-2 positive clients or clients whose status is unknown but requires direct contact such as physical examination or collection of specimens, the staff collecting data or conducting research procedures should at the minimum be provided with Filtering Facepiece (FFP) Respirators.

2.2 Where the study is being undertaken under conditions of low virus abundance (virus-limited) environment such as outdoors or tent with a free flow of air on both sides, surgical masks may be used where budget limitations cannot allow FFP respirators. The research team should preferably double mask in this case.

2.3 Where the study is being undertaken under conditions of high virus abundance (virus-rich) environment such as exist in hospital COVID-19 isolation centres, NIOSH or other approved FFP respirators such as FFP3 or N99 are recommended, with a full COVID-19 protective gear. Where FFP3 or N99 is not available, FFP2 or Surgical N95 respirator can be used.

2.4 With regard to guideline 2.3 above, the PI should ensure that the research team is well oriented on proper donning and doffing procedures as well as other general infection control measures.

2.5 For all studies, the social distancing rule shall be **at least 2metres.**

2.6 No staff member should be exposed to a virus-rich environment **for over 4hours** per day.

2.7 For research centres or study sites with a reception desk, there should be a sneeze guard mounted.

Should you have any questions regarding the implementation of this guideline or should you need further guidance, please contact Prof. Victor Chalwe on 0979883237 or you may contact me directly on 0974770293.

I wish to thank you most sincerely for your cooperation and stay safe. Yours sincerely,

Prof. Godfrey Biemba
Director/CEO
National Health Research Authority