

Public Health Research on COVID-19 at Tulane University

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Anthony Armstrong aarmstr@tulane.edu

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Dr. Lina Moses, far right, with international colleagues at the Geneva headquarters of the World Health Organization (WHO) working to coordinate Coronavirus research efforts. (Photo provided by Lina Moses)

Supporting the work of the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine in its efforts to study the COVID-19 virus could have a real effect on this virus or future public health threats.

Tulane researchers are on the frontline of fighting COVID-19. [Lina Moses, PhD](#), has been at the Geneva headquarters of the World Health Organization (WHO) for almost two months working to coordinate research efforts. She is matching groups with specific research capabilities with research need requests from the WHO, according to Richard Oberhelman, MD. Moses is an assistant professor of epidemiology and disease ecology and is a leading expert in tropical virology. She was on the ground in Sierra Leone as one of the first group of public health responders to the Ebola outbreak.

She is working with [Dr. Oberhelman](#), chair of the Department of Global Community Health and Behavioral Sciences, to enlist students who were set to go overseas this summer on a training grant to instead collect and analyze data collected by WHO partners for an alternative research COVID-19 project, said Oberhelman.

[Ronald Blanton, MD, MS](#), chair of the Department of Tropical Medicine, said School of Public Health staffers are supporting the important work underway at the National Primate Research Center to find a COVID-19 vaccine and test.

In addition [Joshua Yukich, PhD, MPH](#), (an epidemiologist and health economist) and Dahlene Fusco (an assistant professor of medicine) are seeking funds to study the effectiveness of social distancing, said Blanton. “Understanding the social aspects of transmission and prevention is ... vital since it will help us on the next outbreak,” Blanton said.

He asked alumni and friends to consider giving to Tulane to fund COVID-19 research by School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine investigators.

“The really important questions, the questions with the most legs and to some extent the hardest questions to answer, are those of public health,” Dr. Blanton said.

“This is likely not the last time that the average young person will hear ‘shelter in place,’ but what does that mean, how effective is it, how best to do it, are questions that will remain.”

Ronald Blanton

“Funding to answer those questions is slow in coming and often harder to get than for vaccine development,” said Blanton.

And besides money for research, funding is needed for personnel, said Blanton: “The word we are hearing for healthcare workers — ‘surge capacity’ — also holds for public health. A small coterie of dedicated people may have expertise in an area, but a wider range of expertise requires more trained people...The community is turning to the university for answers.”

If generous donors choose to give to Tulane to support COVID-19 public health research, their gifts will have public health contributions, whether they support the work of Dr. Moses in Geneva or the study of social distancing.

“Understanding the public aspects of epidemics is what we do, and our understanding...has clearly helped direct the response on the ground for this epidemic,” Blanton said. “Improving the capacity in terms of public health researchers and studies will put us in better position to respond to the next (epidemic). And we may better know how to develop any new vaccine or any new diagnostic test.”

[Gifts made to the Public Health Research Fund will help support COVID-19 research.](#)