



Worker Protection Program

Tip Sheet

What is the Worker Protection Program?

The Worker Protection Program (WPP) is a program administered by the Occupational Health Clinic and is designed to promote a safe work environment by minimizing the risk of illness or injury associated with working with or around research animals. The program includes an initial enrollment and general education of all personnel working with or exposed to laboratory animals, health history screening, routine and special immunizations, medical care, workforce health surveillance, annual respirator evaluation and fit testing (as needed), and wellness promotion.

Who must participate in the Program?

Participation in the WPP is required for all persons who come into contact with research animals, are potentially exposed to research animals, and/or require facility access to the ARC animal facilities.

How do I become enrolled in the Worker Protection Program?

To become enrolled in the program, you must complete a Health History Questionnaire. Once enrolled, an annual update to your Health History Questionnaire is required within the month of your birthday. Email alerts will be sent to prompt individuals to provide their annual update.

Who reviews the Health History Questionnaire form?

Initial submissions and annual updates to the Health History Questionnaire are confidentially evaluated by nurses in the Occupational Health Clinic. The clinic is also available for any questions regarding occupational hazards when working with research animals.

What happens if I fail to complete my annual update to my Health History Questionnaire Form?

If you fail to complete your annual update to your Health History Questionnaire form within your birthday month, your ARC facility access will be terminated. If your access is terminated for this reason, you must complete the annual update to the Health History Questionnaire and contact the IACUC Office to notify them of HHQ completion.

What if I no longer work with research animals and/or no longer need access to an ARC animal facility?

If you are no longer involved in working with research animals and do not require ARC animal facility access, please contact the IACUC Office so that you may be removed from the WPP. Any existing ARC animal facility access privileges will be terminated upon de-enrollment from the program.

Who can I contact if I have any questions?

You may contact the IACUC Office at (214) 648-0456 or the Occupational Health Clinic at (214) 645-5300.

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Allergies

One of the most common human health concerns while working with or around laboratory animals is the development of animal-associated allergies. The risk of developing an allergy depends on several parameters such as species of animal, facility design (including ventilation), and the employee's "base-line" health status. Humans can develop allergies to animal fur, dander, urine, blood, and saliva. Symptoms of allergies in humans include conjunctivitis, rhinitis (runny nose), itchy eyes, sneezing, asthma or other breathing difficulties, and skin rashes.

Cuts/Bites/Scratches

All individuals working with animals should be aware that laboratory animals may bite or scratch. In addition, the handling of cages, pens, and other equipment can cause cuts or scratches. Cuts, bites, and scratches may result in infection if not appropriately treated. Wearing the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) at all times will help reduce your risk of injury. If you receive a cut, bite, or scratch, the area should be immediately and thoroughly cleansed with soap and running water for at least 15 minutes and you should notify your supervisor. Seek medical attention as deemed necessary.

Zoonotic Diseases/Hygiene

Zoonotic diseases are those that can be transmitted between animals and humans. The most common routes of exposure are by ingestion, inhalation, bites, scratches, splashes, fomites, vectors, or by direct contact. Although laboratory animals rarely transmit zoonotic infections because they are supplied by commercial vendors who eliminate pathogens from their colonies, there is always a risk. Zoonotic diseases can be bacterial, viral, or parasitic. Maintaining proper hygiene is important in order to prevent zoonotic diseases:

- Always wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Wash your hands frequently
- Do not eat, drink, or store food in laboratory areas
- Do not handle contact lenses in the laboratory

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