

**ANNUAL PREVENTIVE MEDICINE PROGRAM STATEMENT  
FOR RESEARCH PERSONNEL WITH ANIMAL CONTACT**

RALPH H. JOHNSON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTER  
INSTITUTIONAL ANIMAL CARE AND USE COMMITTEE (IACUC)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Program Acknowledgement**

I have read "Occupational Health and Safety Program (OHSP) for Personnel with Laboratory Animal Contact" and may receive a personal copy from my Principal Investigator or the VA IACUC.

Initial

**2. Do you have a formal VA appointment (designated in "eighths")?**

Yes  (proceed to item 3)

No  (proceed to item 4)

**3. Please select ONE Preventive Medicine Program (PMP) participation preference. (appointed VA only)**

I am willing to complete an annual PMP questionnaire at Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center for risk assessment, and any interventions provided by VA Employee Health.

Mark One

I am willing to complete an annual PMP questionnaire at Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center for risk assessment, but any interventions will be handled by my primary care physician.

Mark One

I am declining participation in the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center PMP. I acknowledge that non-participation could result in adverse health effects, and I may not opt out of immunizations or tests mandated by the Medical Center Director or Chief of Staff.

Mark One

**4. Are you a MUSC faculty member, staff member, student, or formal volunteer? Yes  No**

**NOTE:** Per memorandum of understanding, MUSC personnel receive occupational health services through MUSC.

**AFFILIATION NOTE:** Individuals who answer "No" to both items 2 and 4 should contact the VA IACUC Coordinator for guidance regarding preventive medicine program participation options.

**5. Certification of Participating Individual**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**6. Form Submission**

Please return a copy of this form to the VA IACUC Coordinator or mail box in the Research Service office.

Interoffice Mailing  
IACUC (151)  
Research Service

# Occupational Health and Safety Program (OHSP) for Personnel with Laboratory Animal Contact

Each VA facility with an animal research program must establish an OHSP to protect the personnel who are involved in animal research, or who are otherwise at risk of exposure to animals or their (unfixed) tissues or fluids. The purpose of this brochure is to explain the components of the OHSP, and provide information on how you can minimize the chance of any adverse health effects from working with laboratory animals.

**Who should participate?** All personnel who work with animals or unfixed tissues in VA research must be given the opportunity to enroll in the OHSP at the VA facility at no charge. Furthermore, individuals who may have intermittent animal exposure must also be given the opportunity to enroll (e.g. IACUC members, housekeeping staff, physical plant, VA police officers) You may choose to decline to receive OHSP services that aren't required to protect the health of personnel and animals. To enroll, contact your VA research administrators or Occupational Health.

**What is included?** The services you receive will depend on the type and frequency of exposure, and your medical history. A medical surveillance questionnaire is often used to assess your individual risk factors. A health professional will review your responses and determine the frequency and type of interaction (tuberculin testing, immunizations, etc.) with the OHSP.

## ANIMAL EXPOSURE RISKS

The hazards associated with handling animals can be divided into three categories:

**1) Physical Hazards.** Examples of such hazards include animal bites and scratches, sharps injuries, injuries associated with moving cages or equipment, and adverse consequences from excessive noise or accidental exposure to workplace. The key to preventing these injuries is proper training and meticulous attention to proper work practices.

- Use appropriate techniques for animal handling and restraint.
- Do not recap needles and dispose of sharps in approved containers.
- Employ good ergonomic practices to avoid muscle sprains and repetitive motion injuries.
- Wear recommended personal protective equipment (PPE) such as a lab coat, gloves, eye and hearing protection.

**2) Allergies.** Allergic reactions to animals are among the most common conditions that affect the health of workers exposed to laboratory animals. Sneezing, itchy eyes, and skin rashes are typical clinical signs, but in serious cases, asthma or anaphylaxis may occur. Allergens include urine, dander, and saliva, especially from rodents. You can limit exposure to allergens by using appropriate PPE and using safe work practices.



### Protect Yourself from Allergies!

- Work in a clean, well-ventilated environment.

- Wear appropriate PPE such as a lab coat and disposable gloves, and **never rub your face or eyes** until you have removed your gloves and washed your hands thoroughly.
- It may be helpful to wear a surgical-type mask to reduce airborne exposure in animal rooms. If you need a respirator, you must be medically cleared, fit tested and trained annually.

**3) Zoonotic diseases.** Zoonotic diseases are those that can be transmitted from animals (or animal tissues) to humans. Although a substantial number of animal pathogens may cause disease in humans, zoonotic diseases are not common in modern animal facilities, largely because of prevention, detection, and eradication programs.

Unfortunately some infections of animals may produce serious disease in humans *even when the animals themselves show few (if any) signs of illness*. Therefore, you must be aware of possible consequences when working with each species of animal and take precautions to minimize the risk of infection. **If you experience flu-like symptoms or other signs of illness, be sure to tell your doctor that you work with animals in case your illness is related to your work with animals.**

**Prevention.** Common sense steps that can be taken to lessen zoonotic disease risk include:

- Do not eat, drink, or apply cosmetics or contact lenses around animals.
- Wear gloves when handling animals or their tissues.
- Use proper manual and/or anesthetic restraint when working with fractious animals and/or administering hazardous agents.

- Work in pairs whenever possible.



**Do not recap used needles!** Whenever possible, use safety devices, activate the safety feature as soon as possible and dispose them promptly in a biohazard “sharps”

container.

- When performing procedures such as bedding changes, blood or urine collections, or necropsies, work in biological safety cabinets or wear specialized PPE as directed.
- **Consult your supervisor, the Safety Officer, or Occupational Health if you need additional training at any time.**

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

### About Bites, Scratches, and other Injuries...

Contact your Supervisor and Occupational Health immediately if you are bitten or scratched, if you injure yourself while performing your job, or if you experience unusual disease symptoms.

### If you are Pregnant...

Working with hazardous agents and toxic chemicals is discouraged during pregnancy. Consult Employee Health and your personal physician for advice about working safely during pregnancy. Toxoplasma is an infectious agent sometimes shed in cat feces, and it can infect the fetus of pregnant women that do not have acquired immunity. Pregnant women should generally avoid any contact with cat feces or litter boxes.



### If you work with Nonhuman Primates...



Diseases of nonhuman primates (NHPs) are often transmissible to humans. Although, several NHP viruses may cause disease in humans, *Herpesvirus simiae* (B-virus) is of greatest concern. This virus occurs naturally in macaques such as rhesus and cynomolgus monkeys. Infected monkeys usually show no clinical signs, but the virus may cause fatal brain infections in humans. Transmission to humans occurs via exposure to contaminated saliva, secretions, or tissues. This typically occurs as a result of a bite or scratch; transmission may also occur via splashes that come in contact with mucous membranes or via injuries caused by contaminated equipment. Proper work practices are essential to preventing exposure.

- Wear PPE, (i.e. protective outer garments, gloves, face mask, and eye protection).
- Anesthetize monkeys whenever possible before handling.
- In the event of possible exposure, obtain medical attention immediately. Instructions for treating wounds and obtaining medical attention must be posted in each nonhuman primate area.

Tuberculosis may be transmitted both from humans to animals and from animals to humans. NHPs and individuals in contact with them must be screened for tuberculosis annually. *Shigella*, *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella*, and *Entamoeba histolytica* cause diarrhea in NHP species and may cause similar problems in humans exposed to NHP feces. Infection is best

prevented by protection from aerosols, the use of gloves, and careful hand washing.

Simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV) is closely related to HIV, the human AIDS virus, and can, on rare occasions, affect macaques. Some evidence suggests it may infect humans as well, so measures should be taken to prevent contact with monkey blood or blood products.

### If you work with Dogs or Cats...



The main risks associated with working with dogs and cats are bites and scratches. Sometimes scratches or bites can result in infections. Cat bites can result in particularly severe infections. Cat scratch fever (Bartonellosis) is caused by a rickettsial organism and is characterized by flu-like symptoms and swollen lymph nodes.

### Rabies

The likelihood of contracting rabies as a result of a bite is now very low because research dogs and cats are typically vaccinated for rabies. Nevertheless, it is recommended that persons in contact with dogs or cats be vaccinated against rabies.

### If you work with Farm Animals...

Q fever, a potentially serious disease caused by *Coxiella burnetii*, is carried by ruminants and shed abundantly from the placental membranes of sheep.



Human exposure can result in pneumonia and other symptoms. Sheep used in research should be assumed to be infected, and careful measures taken to prevent transmission to humans. All individuals working with pregnant laboratory sheep should wear gloves, respiratory protection, and protective outerwear.

### If you work with Rodents or Rabbits...

Allergies are common among personnel who work with rodents (e.g., mice, rats, guinea pigs, hamsters) and rabbits. If you have pre-existing allergies or if you experience a runny nose, itchy eyes, or skin rashes when working around these species you should report these symptoms immediately to Occupational Health. Measures can be taken to limit your exposure to allergens, thereby reducing the severity of symptoms and decreasing the likelihood that symptoms will worsen.



Rodents and rabbits obtained from commercial sources have a low risk of transmitting zoonotic diseases. However, animals caught in the wild can harbor a variety of bacterial, viral, fungal, and parasitic infections that can constitute a significant hazard to personnel.



### If you work with Hazardous Agents...

The proper use of hazardous biological, chemical, and physical agents in animals depends on careful planning, proper training, and careful attention to prescribed work practices. Signs should be posted indicating the

nature of the hazard, necessary precautions, and emergency contact information. The PPE needed depends on the agent in use, but in all cases gloves should be worn and hands should be washed after handling potentially contaminated materials. A biological safety cabinet should be used when handling infectious materials, especially if there is a potential for generation of aerosols, and a fume hood should be used when handling toxic chemicals or radioactive materials. The measures must be appropriate for the specific hazard, as determined by the Safety/Biosafety Officer in consultation with the investigator, the Subcommittee on Research Safety, and the veterinarian.



### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The services offered in your program may differ somewhat from those described in this pamphlet. For further information, contact your research administrators or Occupational Health. More guidance in this area can be found in VHA Handbook 1200.07, "Use of Animals in Research."

