

## Animal Care Operations Occupational Health Program

### **PURPOSE:**

The purpose of the Occupational Health Program for Personnel with Animal Exposure is to promote the health and prevent occupational injury and illness among individuals at the University of Houston who may have occupational exposure to animals. The Occupational Health Program is administered through a partnership with the University of Texas Employee Health Clinical Services.

### **PARTICIPATION:**

The Occupational Health Policy applies to all designated visitors, observers, students, faculty, and staff who work at UT Health or University managed facilities. Enrollment in the program is required for all individuals:

- 1) working within the University facilities which house animals;
- 2) having direct contact with animals;
- 3) having direct contact with non-sanitized animal cages or enclosures;
- 4) having direct contact with non-fixed or non-sterilized animal tissues, fluids, and/or wastes; or 5) providing service or support to animal equipment, devices, and/or facilities.

All personnel who have any contact with laboratory animals may be covered by this program. Hazard identification is accomplished via the ACO Training and protocol review process. Risk assessment is accomplished through the use of the Health Surveillance Questionnaire which is submitted to a health professional versed in occupational health. All information is confidential and the questionnaires are stored by the University of Texas Health Science Center-Houston. Individuals may refuse to participate in the program, but are encouraged to read it carefully to be made aware of potential risks. Principal Investigators (PI) are responsible for assuring that they are in compliance with the program.

### **PROCEDURES:**

ACO provides Occupational Health training which covers an overview of the program. Enrollment forms are available during this training course or accessible via the ACO website: <http://www.uh.edu/research/about/core-facilities/aco/training/>.

Once the enrollment form is completed it should be submitted directly to UT Employee Health Clinical Services via fax 713-486-0983. If there are any questions or to confirm that the fax was received, please call 713-500-3261.

A database of completed enrollment forms is kept by the University of Texas Health Science Center-Houston Employee Health for the medical clearances. Medical clearances are reported to the ACO office for final approval to work in an animal area. Protocols are not approved until the medical clearances for participants are current.

## **LABORATORY ANIMAL ALLERGIES:**

Some people develop allergies to the animals they work with or to their own pets. The incidence is relatively high - some estimate that as many as 15% of a human population is allergic to some animal species. If an employee is allergic to a species that they are exposed to on the job, it can be quite debilitating.

Allergic individuals may display any of a number of symptoms: allergic rhinitis, conjunctivitis, asthma, or by contact dermatitis. Workers may be allergic to any animal species. The allergens are proteins that are excreted in the animals' saliva, urine, and from various glands associated with the skin. The proteins tend to be associated with the animal's hair and with particles of dander.

The animals most commonly associated with work place allergies are mice and rats. Other animals to which allergies are seen include rabbits, cats, guinea pigs, dogs, horses, and even cattle and pigs. An individual could potentially be allergic to almost any animal. Therefore, allergies are clearly an important risk associated with animals.

## **PREVENTION AND TREATMENT:**

Those who work with animals should be aware of the signs and symptoms of animal allergies. If anyone who works with animals develops allergies, this should be reported to UT Employee Health Services for counseling and appropriate treatment. Supervisors and/or PI should be aware of factors in the work place that can increase the exposure of their staff to animal allergens.

The most effective way to control and prevent allergies is to minimize exposure to the allergens. The following practices may help reduce exposures to animal allergens:

- \* Perform animal manipulations in a ventilated Biosafety cabinet.
- \* Wear dedicated protective clothing (i. e. labcoats, scrubs) and personal protective equipment (PPE).
- \* Wash your hands frequently. Avoid touching your hands to your face while working in the vivarium.
- \* If you suffer from allergies to a species you must work with, consider wearing an approved, NIOSH certified N95 respirator when in the animal facility. Respirators are, in general, less effective than the other methods and should not be used as a substitute for good work place hygiene.

## References

Preventing Asthma in Animal Handlers. January, 1998. DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 97-116. Available on the Web at: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/97-116/>

Laboratory Animal Allergy, Bush, R.K; Wood, R.A.; Eggleston, P.A., Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology 1998; 102:99-112.

## **GENERAL RISKS IN LABORATORY ANIMAL SETTING:**

- Latex items such as gloves, masks, etc., can induce sensitization or allergic response
- Steam and hot water are used extensively for sanitation and sterilization and can cause severe thermal burns
- Chemicals such as detergents, acidic descaling agents and alcohol can cause chemical burns or toxicity
- Pharmaceuticals such as anesthetics, antibiotics, analgesics, tranquilizing agents and test drugs can be toxic
- Heavy items such as animals, feed bags and caging can cause lifting or other ergonomic injuries
- Wet floors of animal facilities, which are mopped frequently, present a hazard of slipping and falling
- Carcinogens, radioisotopes and other hazardous test substances must be identified and undergo safety review
- UV lights (in biosafety cabinets) and lasers can damage eyes
- High noise levels from cage wash equipment or loud animals, such as pigs, can cause hearing loss
- Needles, scalpels, and other medical equipment may produce puncture injuries or other physical injuries
- Injuries sustained from bites or scratches when handling laboratory animals



## **REPORTING WORK-RELATED INJURIES**

- **Employee Forms (\*PDF forms available online)**

[Employee's Report of Injury \(SORM-29\)](#) – The employee must complete this form immediately after sustaining a work-related injury. The form should be submitted to the Claims Coordinator who forward a copy to the State Office of Risk Management (SORM)

[Authorization for Release of Information \(SORM-16\)](#) - The employee must complete this form immediately after sustaining a work-related injury and submit to the Claims Coordinator who will forward a copy to SORM.

- **Supervisor Forms (\*PDF forms available online)**

[Supervisor's First Report of Injury or Illness](#) – This form shall be completed by the injured employee's supervisor or their designated representative and submitted to the Claims Coordinator within 24 hours (business days only) in order to meet state stipulated deadlines. Failure to submit the necessary forms on a timely basis may delay medical and income benefits to the injured employee and may result in administrative fines to the University.

[Witness Statement \(SORM-74\)](#) - This form must be completed by each witness to the accident. The injured employee's supervisor or designee should forwarded the statements to the Claims Coordinator.