

Occupational Health & Safety

Teaching/Research Programs Using Cats

INTRODUCTION

The Public Health Service notes that "virtually every medical achievement of the last century has depended directly or indirectly on research with animals". The responsible use of animals in research and teaching remains an important way to solve medical problems. As a participant in this training program, you will be the beneficiary of laboratory animals' vital role in biomedical research and training.

The University of Mississippi Medical Center is certified and regulated by the United States Department of Agriculture as a registered research facility. Likewise, the institution has an Assurance Statement on file with the Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare through the National Institutes of Health. A prominent form of accreditation is found with the Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care International, signifying the ultimate level of responsible animal care and use.

All research and teaching studies using animals are reviewed and approved by an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee. This committee is composed of scientists, physicians, veterinarians, business professionals, and community members. Each approval confirms the scientific and medical necessity of the animal study and assures appropriate animal care and use.

In compliance with the Animal Welfare Act and Regulations, the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) is required to "review, and if warranted, investigate concerns involving the care and use of animals at the research facility resulting from public complaints received and from reports of noncompliance received from laboratory or research facility personnel or employees". **If you suspect any deficiencies in animal care or treatment or have any questions or concerns about specific use of animals at UMMC, please contact the IACUC-Office of Research, U-020, 815-5006, or the Laboratory Animal Facilities, G-201, 984-1385.** All reports will remain confidential and free of reprisal.

POTENTIAL HAZARDS

Zoonoses: Working with animals presents some inherent risks. Physical injury from bites and scratches are uncommon with appropriate handling techniques. As well, zoonotic diseases [a disease of animals capable of afflicting humans] may be found in cats and have the possibility of affecting personnel. Notably, *Toxoplasma gondii* is a coccidian parasite found in cat feces that can affect immunocompromised persons and is particularly devastating to the developing fetus. Pregnant women should avoid any contact with cat feces.

Each cat is evaluated by a member of the veterinary staff for indications of infectious or zoonotic diseases. Individual animal health is continually evaluated throughout the animal's stay. All animals in this laboratory session have been found to be healthy and show no indication of clinical diseases. One particular zoonotic disease is quite prevalent in animal environments, that being allergic reactions to laboratory animal dander and proteins. Personnel should take precautions to avoid exposures and limit the allergic potential by wearing gloves and facemasks.

Other Hazards: The animal research environment contains many hazardous risks that must be recognized. Physical hazards include potential injuries from heat/steam exposure, slips and falls due to wet floor surfaces, and ionizing radiation. Chemical hazards may include contact or exposure to disinfectants and environmental cleansers as well as intentional animal exposures. Finally, biologic hazards may be found in studies involving microbial and infectious disease research.

PROTECTION

Primary means of protecting yourself from an injury or illness are found in being knowledgeable and aware of potential risks. Persons working with live animals should wear gloves and minimize skin-to-skin exposures. Hypersensitive individuals should take special considerations after consulting their medical providers. Additionally, persons may have some unique health issue leading to an increased susceptibility to zoonotic diseases, likewise prompting their consultation with a health care provider.

Should an injury or problem develop as a result of a zoonotic disease or animal-related exposure, persons should report the problem to Student/Employee Health (N-128) [report to UMC Emergency Room after-hours and on weekends].

Print: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____