



THE UNIVERSITY
OF BIRMINGHAM

Health and Safety Policy
Control of Allergies to Laboratory Animals

UHSP/21/CALA/03

This document sets out in more detail the arrangements for compliance with University Health and Safety Policy at Budget Centre level and it gives guidance on how these requirements may be met. This document forms a part of the University Health and Safety Policy. It has been approved by the Environment, Health and Safety Executive Committee, in consultation with the Joint Safety Advisory Committee, and it will be subject to review.

This Policy replaces the former University Safety Policy *Control of Allergies to Laboratory Animals* (USP/93/ALA/12).

Adequate and effective control of Laboratory Animal Allergy is vital - Animal Allergy is an irreversible condition – once an individual is sensitised they will remain so for the rest of their life.

November 2003
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Control of Allergies to Laboratory Animals

UHSP/21/CALA/03

INTRODUCTION

Laboratory animal allergy (LAA) is an allergic or hypersensitivity response which may develop as a result of exposure to animal allergens, such as hair, fur, dander, urine and droppings from mammals, birds or insects. Symptoms include a runny nose or rhinitis, skin rashes and watery eyes. Some workers may develop asthma. The condition is irreversible – once an individual is sensitised they will remain so for the rest of their life. Most cases of LAA arise in persons working with rats and mice, probably because these are the most commonly used animals in experimental work.

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations require the University to make a suitable and sufficient assessment of risks to health created by exposure to animal allergens and to institute measures to prevent or control exposure. Further guidance is given in the HSE's Guidance Note EH76.

Scope of document

This policy covers all work with animals, both within the Biomedical Services Unit, and in laboratories within academic Budget Centres. This policy does not cover the prevention or control of exposure to animal allergens in the field. This should, however, be considered when undertaking a risk assessment for fieldwork activities

POLICY

Heads of Budget Centre must make arrangements to ensure that:

- all work with animals is assessed in advance;
- risk assessments are reviewed whenever there is a change in the work activity, and at least annually to ensure that they remain relevant;
- appropriate measures are provided to ensure that exposure to animal allergens is prevented or adequately controlled;
- where, after applying engineering and other controls, it is not possible to prevent or adequately control exposure to animal allergens, respiratory protective equipment (RPE) and other personal protective equipment is provided and worn by persons who may be exposed to animal allergens;
- equipment and facilities, including respiratory protective equipment and other personal protective equipment, are maintained and, where appropriate, tested to ensure safe and efficient operation;
- where respiratory protective equipment is provided, fit testing is performed for each user;
- all persons who are, or may be, exposed to animal allergens are provided with appropriate information, instruction and training to understand the risks and the precautions needed to adequately control exposure;
- all persons likely to be exposed to animal allergens are provided with health surveillance by the health and safety unit;
- records of assessments, training, any accidents or reports of sensitisation and tests and repairs on respiratory protective equipment are kept;
- separate areas are provided for the storage of personal clothing and personal protective equipment.

The Director of the Biomedical Services Unit must make arrangements to ensure that:

- only persons authorised by BMSU have access to BMSU facilities;
- all persons with authorised access to BMSU, whether employees, researchers, students, visitors or contractors, comply with this policy and BMSU's local rules and procedures;
- information, instruction and training is provided for all persons who will engage in work in bmsu that may expose them to laboratory animal allergens;
- all personal and respiratory protective equipment provided by BMSU is properly maintained;
- maintenance staff or contractors are not allowed to commence work in areas where potential hazards exist until either the area has been made safe or a safe system of work has been devised.

Supervisors must:

- provide appropriate supervision and monitor compliance with this policy and local rules;
- ensure that work under their supervision has been assessed and controls implemented before work commences;
- ensure that the appropriate control measures are being used and procedures followed, and that the persons whom they are supervising are aware of the hazards of animal work, particularly animal allergens;
- assess the competence of persons under their control to work safely and where appropriate arrange for any necessary training;
- ensure that persons under their control report any symptoms of laa to occupational health staff in the health and safety unit;
- inform:
 - their head of Budget Centre;
 - the Director of BMSU;
 - the Budget Centre Health and Safety Co-ordinator(s);of any incidence of respiratory or skin sensitisation suffered by an individual under their supervision.

Individuals must:

- follow the specified safe working practices and wear appropriate protective equipment to minimise exposure to animal allergens;
- report any incidents, accidents or defects in equipment relating to work with animals;
- report any symptoms of LAA to their supervisor;
- co-operate with their supervisors, Health and Safety Co-ordinators, Biological Safety Officers and any other person appointed to advise or monitor health and safety in the local arrangements.

The Director of the Health and Safety Unit must make arrangements to ensure that:

- health surveillance is provided for all persons working with animals;
- health records of individuals under health surveillance are maintained;
- Pre-employment Medical Questionnaires of new animal workers are screened;

- the enforcing authorities are notified as required under the *Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR)* in the event that an employee whose work involves exposure to animals is diagnosed as suffering with occupational asthma.

GUIDANCE

Research workers should prepare their own risk assessments for working with animals in consultation with the Biological Safety Officer or Deputy in BMSU. All assessments should consider the following:

- sources of exposure;
- routes of exposure; who is exposed;
- duration, frequency and nature of exposure; and
- control measures.

Persons who may be exposed include employees, students, maintenance staff and visitors.

1 Control Measures

(a) Restriction of Access

Access to areas where animals are kept or handled should be restricted to authorised persons. (Access to the Biomedical Services Unit is controlled by a security key system.)

(b) Building Ventilation and Local Exhaust Ventilation

The ventilation in the Biomedical Services Building is designed to minimise exposure to animal allergens and should, if correctly used and properly maintained, considerably reduce the risk of developing allergies to animals. Local Exhaust Ventilation (LEV) is available for tasks such as cage cleaning. The use of ventilated hoods and benches is preferred for experimental procedures on animals.

(c) Protective clothing

The requirement for protective clothing applies to all persons entering animal accommodation. In particular:

- gloves when handling animals, especially when exposure to urine and other body fluids is likely. Latex gloves should not be used as they can also cause skin allergies and asthma;
- eye/face protection for operations where there is a risk of splashing the face; and
- respiratory protection against airborne particulate material. Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) should be worn for all specified tasks within the Biomedical Services Unit, and for all procedures where the risk assessment indicates that RPE is necessary. Different forms of RPE provide different levels of protection, and the assessment will need to identify the level of risk and therefore the type of RPE required.

To be effective, RPE must be properly fitted and used correctly. *The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations* require fit testing of facepieces to be carried out to ensure that the selected facepiece is of the right size and is fitted correctly.

The law also requires all RPE, excluding disposable masks, to be regularly maintained and tested and records kept of these tests. Powered helmets should be cleaned regularly, either in a ventilated enclosure or by a person wearing a suitable respirator. Batteries should be charged and filters changed as appropriate.

(d) Working practices

- Animal rooms should be kept as clean and dust free as practicable. Production of dusts and aerosols should be minimised. A risk assessment is available for environmental cleaning within the animal house.

- Animals should be handled gently. When animals are clipped or shaved, the fur should be removed quickly and carefully (possibly dampened) or equivalent containment measures taken.
- Spillages of animal body fluids should always be cleaned up promptly.
- Hands should be washed thoroughly when contaminated with animal faeces or body fluids, and also (after removal of protective clothing) when leaving the animal house/room.
- Eating, drinking, smoking and chewing should only take place in rooms designated for that purpose. Protective clothing should always be removed before entry into these areas.
- Reports (other than brief notes) should not be written in areas where animal allergen contamination is present.
- Transportation of animals outside the animal house should be kept to a minimum and filter top boxes used where practicable.

2 Maintenance of Control Measures

The COSHH Regulations require that control measures, such as Local Exhaust Ventilation (LEV) or Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), are checked, serviced, maintained and tested to ensure they continue to perform as intended and prevent or control exposure to animal allergens. LEV includes fume cupboards, microbiological safety cabinets, ventilated cages, etc. and the BMSU air handling system. Some of the statutory testing and maintenance is arranged through the Estate Management Office which also is responsible for monitoring and maintaining records of all statutory testing in the University (see Statutory Inspection, Examination and/or Testing of Specified Equipment:.....: UHSP/16/SIET/01).

All individuals have a responsibility to be aware that equipment is functioning correctly and effectively and, if not, to report defects without delay. COSHH requires LEV and other enclosures to be visually checked at least once a week.

Respiratory Protective Equipment, other than disposable facepieces, must be examined and tested at suitable intervals in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Records of all tests, examinations and repairs should be kept for at least 5 years.

Personal protective equipment should be stored in a clearly defined place. It should always be removed on leaving the work area and decontaminated or destroyed as appropriate.

3 Health Surveillance

All persons who may be exposed to animals as part of their work will be required to complete a pre-employment respiratory questionnaire. This will be sent to the Occupational Health Staff in the Health and Safety Unit who will undertake a health interview, examination and further tests as appropriate before making a recommendation as to the suitability of the person for work involving exposure to animals.

Persons who are already exposed to animals will be required to complete periodic health questionnaires and undergo such other tests or procedures as may be deemed necessary by the Occupational Health Nursing Adviser.

Persons who think they may be developing allergy to animals should tell their supervisor and health and safety co-ordinator immediately. In many cases it is possible to reduce the severity of symptoms by limiting or controlling exposure.

4 Information, Instruction and Training

All persons in posts involving work or study where exposure to animals is possible will need to be given appropriate information, instruction and training. Persons will not be allowed to work with animals unless they have received the appropriate training and instruction from BMSU as evidenced by a signed note authorising the person to be allowed to work in BMSU by the Biological Safety Officer

or deputy. This will include not only training in the handling of animals, but also in recognition of the hazards associated with animal work and the corresponding use of controls, such as RPE.

Before starting work with animals, all staff and students should receive the following information:

- There is a possibility that any individual may have an allergy to the animals they are in contact with or may develop such an allergy in the future.
- In most cases, the condition, though not reversible, is controllable by the use of protective clothing or medication and that most people who are affected are able to continue working with animals.
- In a few cases of laboratory animal allergy, unfortunately, it is not possible to continue working with animals.
- Symptoms of laboratory animal allergy (may appear during or after exposure to animals):
 - Blocked, itchy or runny nose;
 - Itchy or watery eyes;
 - Skin rash;
 - Tightness of the chest;
 - Wheezy or whistling chest;
 - Attacks of shortness of breath;
- If the above symptoms appear during or after exposure to animals, this may be indicative of an allergic condition.
- Duties under this Policy.

APPENDIX

Contact telephone numbers

Biomedical Services Unit.

Director	46963
Health and Safety Co-ordinator	45389

Health and Safety Unit

Director	45250
Occupational Health Physician	45117
Occupational Health Nursing Advisers	45116, 42695
Biological Hazards advice	45255
Chemical Hazards advice	45252

Estate Management Office

Emergency Maintenance	46406 (or 43000 1630-0830)
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References

Control of laboratory animal allergy, Guidance Note EH76. Health and Safety Executive

Working safely with research animals: Management of infection risks. HSC, Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens, 1997 HSE Books. ISBN 0717613771

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 Approved Code of Practice and Guidance, Health and Safety Commission, HSE Books. ISBN 0717625346

Fit testing of Respiratory Protective equipment facepieces. HSE 282/28. Health and Safety Executive

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