



## **UNCG IACUC Occupational Health Program**

### **PREFACE**

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro is committed to ensuring the health and safety of individuals working with animals in their professional activities, both on and off campus. The goal of the Occupational Health program is to prevent occupational injury and illness while working with animals by avoiding, controlling or eliminating hazards on campus and, to the extent possible, off campus. The program emphasizes prevention of illness and injury, but also includes provisions for early diagnosis and treatment when necessary.

The Occupational Health program applies to everyone who works with research animals, both on and off campus. There are two groups of people who must participate in the program for preventing occupational injury, allergies and illness while working with animals at UNCG.

- 1) Animal Facility personnel: Individuals hired by and working in/for the Animal Facility on a full or part-time basis. Personnel in the Animal Facility must follow occupational health guidelines established by the Animal Facility.
- 2) UNCG faculty, staff, and students engaged in funded or unfunded animal research projects or teaching in a class or field setting. Faculty, staff, and students who work with animals must follow the guidelines contained in this document.

The occupational health program is supported by the Office of Research Integrity (ORI). It requires effective interactions among researchers, the Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), the Attending Veterinarian, the University Safety Office, and UNCG Student Health Services. The occupational health program is made up of the following key points: Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment, Personal Hygiene/Protection, and Medical Evaluations, Allergies, and Animal Handler Training.

## **HAZARD IDENTIFICATION AND RISK ASSESSMENT**

It is the responsibility of principal investigators (PIs) who work with animals to assess dangers associated with their work, how it may affect their student researchers, and to select safeguards appropriate to the risks. The UNCG Student Health Services will perform medical evaluations to ensure that the risks remain at acceptable levels.

## **PERSONAL HYGIENE/PROTECTION**

It is essential that all personnel maintain a high standard of personal cleanliness. Individuals who work with animals should wash their hands and change clothing as often as necessary to maintain good personal hygiene. They should wear clothing suitable for use in the Animal Facility, classroom laboratories, or field studies. Disposable gloves, masks, head covers, coats, coveralls, and shoe covers are required within the animal facility, and highly recommended in the field. Laboratory coats worn in the Animal Facility should not be worn outside of the facility. Likewise, clothing worn in field studies should be contained in a safe and sanitized manner as noted below in the Medical Evaluations.

Some individuals who work with animals may need to wear a respirator while they are working. They can self-identify or it can be determined as a result of the information supplied on the initial medical evaluation. If it is determined that an individual needs to use a respirator when working with animals, then the individual must complete the [Occupational Health and Safety Medical Questionnaire and Evaluation for Respirator Use form](#) and enroll in the [Respiratory Safety Program](#). Individuals can be fitted for the respirator by the Office of Safety at UNCG.

## **MEDICAL EVALUATIONS**

All individuals who have a potential risk from their work with animals are required to have a medical evaluation prior to initiating the work, referred to in this document as the initial medical evaluation. An annual follow-up evaluation is required, as long as the work with animals continues. All individuals named in an IACUC protocol will be required to have a medical evaluation, unless the PI identifies particular individuals who will not have any risks associated with animal exposure.

Both the initial and the follow-up medical evaluations are conducted by the UNCG Student Health Services. Individuals may elect to use their personal physician if it is more feasible, however they must complete an Occupational Health Exception and Release, Hold Harmless and Indemnity form, and have their physician complete all of the required screening forms. After satisfactory completion of either evaluation, the UNCG Student Health Services or the personal physician will notify the ORI and the individual.

**Step One** (required): The individual who will be working with animals must complete a medical questionnaire. In the questionnaire individuals disclose existing medical conditions, species to which they will be exposed, and other relevant personal health information. This questionnaire must be sent to UNCG Student Health Services to the attention of Eldaliz Fernandez, MD via campus mail or fax (336) 334-3299. The purpose of this evaluation is to identify conditions, if any, that may cause an increased risk of adverse health effects that could result from working with animals. The questionnaire is evaluated by Eldaliz Fernandez, MD at UNCG Student Health Services for a nominal fee. Faculty and staff will be charged a nominal fee, and the department will be billed by interdepartmental mail following the completion of the form. Students who pay a health fee will receive a discounted rate.. Work with animals may not begin if UNCG Student Health Services identify that additional steps are necessary. Then work should be delayed until they are completed. Frequently, this is the only step required.

**Step Two** (if recommended): The UNCG Student Health Service may *recommend* that individuals complete a physical examination. The physical examination can be done by either the UNCG Student Health Services or the individual's personal physician. The expense for this examination will be paid by the individual or his employer. This examination may identify the need for vaccinations or immunizations. Once this step is completed satisfactorily, work with animals may begin.

**Annual Follow up:** The Office of Research Integrity will send an annual follow-up medical questionnaire prior to the anniversary date of the last evaluation to all individuals who have been issued a medical clearance. Any changes to the work with animals that has occurred since the last medical clearance must be reported. The medical questionnaire will be evaluated by the UNCG Student Health Services on the same fee schedule noted above. The UNCG Student Health Services or individuals personal physician will give the results of this evaluation to the ORI and the individual.

Personal medical information generated by any of these exams will be kept confidential. If a physical examination is necessary, this information will remain between the employee/student and the physician. The employee/student can contact the physician who performs the examination with any questions regarding the results.

## **ALLERGIES**

Prolonged exposure to animal allergens in the workplace may lead to animal allergies or asthma. Allergies are hypersensitivities caused by protein allergens released from animal fur, feathers, saliva or secretions. Inhalation and skin contact are the most common route for allergen exposure. Over a period of time a person may be exposed to a sufficient amount of allergen to become sensitized. Once sensitized, the person's next exposure to that allergen will cause an allergic reaction. Allergic reactions can be minimal, such as itching, or red skin, or may be severe, such as anaphylaxis. Individuals should protect themselves from being exposed to animal allergens, thereby decreasing the risk of acquiring animal allergies in the research environment. Allergies which are identified

while a person is working with research animals should be reported to the UNCG Student Health Services center immediately.

## **ANIMAL HANDLER TRAINING**

Individuals who work with animals should be given clearly defined procedural training for the risks they incur by working with animals, and all training should be documented and maintained. This training should include the following topics, if applicable to the research:

- Chemical safety
- Zoonoses (any infectious disease that may be transmitted from animals, both wild and domestic, to humans or from humans to animals)
- Allergy Training
- Proper handling of waste materials
- Physical hazards (including physical injuries caused by bites, scratches, kicks or other actions of animals during handling)
- Sharps injuries (breaks in the skin due to needles, scalpels or other sharp instruments)
- Experimental hazards – biological, radiological or chemical agents administered to animals for purposes of studying a disease process;
- Unusual conditions or agents that might be part of experimental procedures (e.g., immuno-compromised animals)
- Personal hygiene
- Precautions to be taken if personnel are pregnant, ill, or have decreased immunocompetence as appropriate to the risk imposed by their workplace/environment

The PI or Lead Professor is responsible for providing or ensuring that personnel have undergone appropriate training. If needed, he or she may draw upon input from the standing physician at UNCG Student Health Services, the Attending Veterinarian, the Office of Research Integrity, and/or the Office of Safety at UNCG. This training must provide appropriate instructions for conducting duties, an understanding of the hazards involved, and assurance that proficiency is attained in implementing the required safeguards. This training is in addition to the IACUC required Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) modules.