



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 emphasis of such a program is the prevention of illness and injury, but our program also includes provisions for early diagnosis and treatment when necessary.

There are two programs for preventing occupational injury, allergies and illness while working with animals at UNCG. One is for personnel hired by the Animal Facility and one is for individuals that work with animals but who are not hired by the Animal Facility. Animal Facility personnel include individuals who work in the Animal Facility on a full or part-time basis. Individuals who work with animals but are not hired by the Animal Facility include faculty, staff, and students engaged in funded or unfunded research projects or teaching in a class or field setting. Personnel in the Animal Facility must follow guidelines established by the Animal Facility. 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. 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 it is necessary for an individual 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. Thereafter, a follow-up evaluation is required annually, as long as the work with animals continues. All individuals that submit 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.

The first step of the initial medical evaluation, and frequently the only step required, is for the individual who will be working with animals to 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 provide early identification of conditions, if any, that may present 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 approximately \$15 for faculty and staff. Currently enrolled students will be free of charge.** 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.

Based on the recommendation from the UNCG Student Health Service, individuals *may* be asked to submit to a second step of the initial medical evaluation, 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.

The Office of Research Integrity will send to all individuals who have been issued a medical clearance an annual follow-up medical questionnaire prior to the anniversary date of the last evaluation. 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

Some people develop allergies to the animals they work with or to their own pets. The incidence is quite high - some estimate that as many as 15% of a human population is allergic to some animal species - for those who regularly work with animals as part of their occupation (such as researchers or animal care providers), the estimate is up to 40%.

Allergic individuals may display any of a number of symptoms; allergic rhinitis (a condition characterized by runny nose and sneezing similar to hay fever); by allergic conjunctivitis (irritation and tearing of the eyes); by asthma (characterized by wheezing and shortness of breath), or by contact dermatitis (a red, bumpy rash that may appear where your skin touches the animal). If you have a stuffy nose or other respiratory signs, and if it seems to last longer than a common cold (weeks instead of days) then you may very well be suffering from an allergy. If you develop suspicious symptoms whenever you're exposed to a certain species, then you're very likely to have an animal allergy.

The animals most commonly associated with workplace allergies are mice and rats, perhaps these are the most common laboratory animals. An individual could potentially be allergic to almost any animal. Allergy is clearly an important risk associated with animals

The Office of Research Integrity along with the IACUC Veterinarian and UNCG Office of Safety has put together a helpful [Lab Animal Safety training on Allergies](#) and lab animals available on the IACUC website. These trainings combined with the required Occupational Health Training clearance form, as well as an orientation with the Facility Operations manager at the animal facility will further address these potential hazards.

ANIMAL HANDLER TRAINING

Individuals who work with animals should be given clearly defined procedural training for the risks they incur by working with animals. This training should include chemical safety; zoonoses (any infectious disease that may be transmitted from animals, both wild and domestic, to humans or from humans to animals); proper handling of waste materials; microbiological and physical hazards (including those related to radiation and allergies); unusual conditions or agents that might be part of experimental procedures (e.g., immunocompromised animals), personal hygiene, and other considerations (e.g. precautions to be taken if personnel are pregnant, ill, or have decreased immunocompetence) as appropriate to the risk imposed by their workplace/environment.

The Office of Research Integrity along with the IACUC Veterinarian and UNCG Office of Safety has put together a helpful [Lab Animal Safety training on Zoonotic and Infectious Agents](#) available on the IACUC website. This training is in addition to the IACUC required Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) modules.

The PI or Lead Professor is responsible for overseeing the adherence to this training by students and staff. 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.