

UT Southwestern Occupational Health Department

POLICY MANUAL

Section: Worker Protection Program

Policy 11.00: Worker Protection Program Policy

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Responsible Office: Occupational Health
Effective Date: February 3, 2014
Last Reviewed: February 3, 2017
Next Scheduled Review: February 3, 2023
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POLICY RATIONALE AND TEXT

UT Southwestern is committed to the health and safety of individuals working with or near research animals. Personnel working with research animals face several occupational health risks, including the possibility of allergic reactions, animal-related injuries such as bites, or exposure to zoonoses or hazardous materials. The Worker Protection Program (WPP or Program) is a research-specific program offered by the Occupational Health Department designed to promote the safety of those working with animals and to minimize the risk of illness or injury associated with working with or around research animals through education, health assessments and medical surveillance. The Program was developed using guidelines found in the *Occupational Health and Safety in the Care and Use of Research Animals* (National Academy Press, 1997).

It is the policy of UT Southwestern to comply with all pertinent federal, state and local laws, regulations and guidelines regarding the protection of individuals who have routine exposure to animals.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all faculty, staff, fellows, and students whose duties involve routine exposure to animals, animal waste, or animal tissues, and to those who have less obvious exposure to animals including personnel in non-research units such as Facilities Management and the UT Southwestern Medical Center Police Department.

PROCEDURES

Identification

WPP participants will be identified through (i) the new hire process, (ii) Animal Resource Center (ARC) badge access requests, (iii) the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) protocol review process or (iv) self-identification.

Enrollment

Enrollment in the Program is required for all individuals whose duties involve routine exposure to animals, animal waste or animal tissues, and participation in the Program is expected in order to receive access to any UT Southwestern animal facilities. Enrollment in the Program requires the completion of an initial Health History Questionnaire (HHQ) and approval by the Occupational Health Department. Once enrolled, an individual will receive educational materials about risks associated with their work environment and participation in the health assessment and medical surveillance program. Medical exams, vaccinations, and any screening, if needed, are free of charge to the participant.

Individuals whose job duties do not involve routine exposure to animals should be provided any necessary training about risks associated with exposure to animals, animal waste, or animal tissues and relevant animal facility policies and procedures.

Health History Questionnaires

Individuals enrolling in the Program will be required to complete an initial (baseline) HHQ, which must be reviewed by the Occupational Health Department prior to the enrollee having exposure to animals. Enrolled individuals also must complete an annual HHQ update, which must be reviewed by the Occupational Health Department, to continue working with animals. These forms are accessible through the ERGO Research Portal.

All HHQs will be reviewed by an Occupational Health healthcare provider upon submission by the enrollee. Based on potential risk and/or medical history, a follow-up appointment in the Occupational Health Department may be offered. Between HHQ reviews, if there are any changes in an enrollee's medical history, such as increased allergy symptoms, a compromised immune system, pregnancy, or the intent to become pregnant, enrollees should update their HHQ immediately. Annual HHQ updates will be scheduled for completion during the enrollee's birth month.

Participation

At a minimum, participation in the Program requires submitting the initial HHQ and annual HHQ updates, completing any required WPP and principal investigator training, using necessary personal protective equipment (PPE), and following all UT Southwestern safety policies and procedures.

Enrollees are also expected to participate in the medical surveillance portion of the Program and to complete follow-up requests from the Occupational Health Department health care professional. Follow-up requests from the Occupational Health Department are for the individual worker's protection and compliance is strongly encouraged. While full participation in the Program is strongly encouraged, enrollees may have the option of declining Occupational Health follow-up requests. Enrollees may decline to complete follow-up requests by acknowledging awareness of risks associated with routine exposure to animals and with non-participation in the Program, provided the enrollee has first undergone required WPP training. One inherent risk associated with declining follow-up is the possibility of adverse health effects related to the occupational exposure. The declination for follow-ups can be reversed at any point by contacting the Occupational Health Department or resubmitting a HHQ or HHQ annual update. Because the Program is designed to protect individuals who have routine exposure to animals, declining to participate may result in access to areas where animals are used being limited or denied. UT Southwestern reserves the right to require individuals to participate in all aspects of the Program as it deems necessary.

Animal Related Illness, Injury, or Unsafe Conditions

Any on-the-job injury, accident, or disease arising out of and in the course and scope of employment – regardless of how minor it may seem – should be immediately reported to an employee's supervisor or manager as required under EMP-303 Workers' Compensation Insurance Program, as well as to the Occupational Health Department.

Enrollee Information

Protected health information of WPP enrollees will be treated in a manner consistent with UT Southwestern's HIPAA policies.

Specific Departmental Procedures

Occupational Health WPP Procedure: see WPP-11P-01 Program Procedure

RESPONSIBILITIES

WPP enrollees are responsible for:

1. Completing any required animal care and use training or principal investigator training.
2. Being familiar with all standard operating procedures for safety, personal hygiene, and emergency

situations.

3. Enrolling in the Program prior to having exposure to animals through submission of the initial HHQ.
4. Completing the annual HHQ update during their birth month.
5. Maintaining good hygiene practices, wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and following safe operating procedures at all times.
6. Informing their supervisor and the Occupational Health Department immediately of any animal bites, scratches, illnesses, or injuries received from working with or around animals.
7. Notifying their supervisor and the Occupational Health Department immediately in the event of a possible biological, radiological, chemical, or physical agent exposure.
8. Following through on requests from the Occupational Health Department for medical evaluation, immunizations, diagnostic testing and/or referral.

The Occupational Health Department is responsible for:

1. Educating WPP enrollees on the health risks associated with their particular work environment.
2. Reviewing all HHQs for health risks.
3. Evaluating enrollee health information and any required physical examination, respiratory fit testing and diagnostic studies based on inherent risk, exposure, and medical history.
4. Identifying enrollees with signs or symptoms, or a predisposition to illness or disease which would require engineering or administrative controls to reduce exposure.
5. Medical care and/or referral for work related injuries or illnesses.
6. Submitting approved HHQs through ERGO for ARC badge clearance.
7. Maintaining all employee health records in accordance with applicable standards.
8. Reporting the following to the IACUC:
 - a. Number of HHQs submitted for and reviewed the preceding month
 - b. Number of initial and annual HHQs submitted
 - c. Number of declinations for Occupational Health Department follow-up
 - d. Trends noted in annual follow-ups
 - e. Clinical events involving animal use
 - f. Percentage of submitted HHQs evaluated within a two business day timeframe

The IACUC is responsible for:

1. Oversight of the Program
2. WPP training during New Hire Orientation.
3. Verification of individual enrollment in the Program.

DEFINITIONS

Enrollment (Worker Protection Program) - is defined as an enrollee having a completed and submitted a Health History Questionnaire which has been evaluated and approved by the Occupational Health Department.

Health History Questionnaire (HHQ) – a medical screening tool designed specifically for those workers exposed to animals, animal waste, or animal tissues.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – safety equipment such as gloves, aprons, face shield, or goggles which are required to be worn when coming into contact with animals, hazardous chemicals, toxic materials, etc.

Medical surveillance program – the systematic assessment of employees exposed or potentially exposed to occupational hazards. This assessment monitors individuals for adverse health effects and determines the effectiveness of exposure prevention strategies with the goal to reduce and ultimately prevent occupational illness and injury.

Allergic reactions – occur when the immune system reacts to a foreign substance such as animal dander. The severity of allergies varies from person to person and can range from minor irritation to anaphylaxis which is a potentially life-threatening emergency.

Hazardous materials –biological, radiological and chemical materials, including volatile anesthetics, which present

a risk or potential risk to the health of individuals.

Compromised immune system – medical conditions or disorders that would increase an individual’s susceptibility to disease or illness. Healthy immune systems are the best defense against allergens, viruses, bacteria, and other vectors commonly encountered while working with animals.

Zoonoses - All diseases and infections transmitted between animal and humans including bacteria, viruses, parasites, or other vectors and causing disease under natural conditions. Examples include: Q-fever, rabies, enteric bacteria, toxoplasmosis, tuberculosis, and salmonella.

RELATED STATUTES, OTHER POLICIES, REQUIREMENTS, OR STANDARDS

Occupational Health and Safety in the Care and Use of Research Animals (National Academy Press, 1997)

[RES-202 Standards of Care and Use of Laboratory Animals](#) The Handbook Chapter 12

CONTACTS/FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Worker Protection Program 214-648-5196

Occupation Health Department 214-645-5300

WorkerProtection@UTSouthwestern.edu

FORMS, TOOLS, ONLINE PROCESSES

[ERGO Research Portal](#)

[Worker Protection Program](#)

WEBSITE ADDRESS FOR THIS POLICY

Copy and paste the URL here