



SOP: Laboratory Animal Bites and Scratches Policy

Reference : USA OHP Manual

INFORMATION GUIDE

All animals are capable of inflicting bites and scratches. Small animals, such as mice, gerbils, hamsters, rats, guinea pigs, and rabbits, usually deliver relatively minor wounds. Larger species like cats, dogs, and nonhuman primates can inflict severe injuries. Bites and scratches can expose laboratory personnel, animal technicians, and others working with animals to potential hazards transmitted through contaminated saliva, secretions, or blood. These injuries are largely preventable through proper training in animal handling techniques.

Zoonosis is a disease of animals that is transmissible to humans. Although not likely, there remains zoonotic agents associated with laboratory animals, some of which can be life threatening. Prevention of exposure to these animal-related illnesses requires knowledge of the zoonosis related to the animals with which you will be working. If you are exposed through a bite, scratch, aerosol droplet, mucosal secretion, feces, or urine, there is the potential for you to become infected, and medical consultation through the USA Student Health Clinic is recommended. This clinic serves as the medical care provider for the USA Occupational Health Program for those working with animals in University facilities.

In addition, personnel should maintain current tetanus immunizations, seek prompt medical review of wounds, and initiate a veterinary evaluation of the animal involved through the Department of Comparative Medicine, if warranted. Rabies, Herpes B-virus infection, Hantavirus infection, cat-scratch fever, tularemia, and rat-bite fever are specific diseases that animal bites can transmit.

BITE and SCRATCH PREVENTION

In the research laboratory or animal holding facility, one of the most important things you can do to prevent bites and scratches is learn the correct methods of handling the species you intend to work with. Protective equipment, such as gloves and long-sleeved laboratory coats, limits hand, and arms injury. Leather gloves afford additional protection if necessary. Appropriate restraining devices should be used when deemed necessary. You can contact a member of the veterinary staff of the Department of Comparative Medicine (460-6239) for guidance.

FIRST AID for ANIMAL BITES and SCRATCHES

1. As soon as possible, wash the wound with plenty of soap (preferably antiseptic soap, such as chlorhexidine-Nolvasan® or Betadine®povidone-iodine) and water for at least 15 minutes.
2. Cover with sterile gauze, non-sterile gauze, or a paper towel if the wound is bleeding. Sterile gauze is preferred.
3. Notify your supervisor.
4. Depending on the severity of the wound, seek medical treatment as follows: proceed to the USA Industrial Health Clinic (phone 660-5910). After business hours or weekends, go to USA University Hospital Emergency Department.
5. Reference the Occupational Health booklet for additional instructions on animal-related injuries and illnesses (<https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/research/compliance/animalcare/occupational-health-enrollment.html> under Occupational Health Training).
6. As soon as possible, complete a “First Report of Injury” form from your supervisor or the Office of Comparative Medicine.

ZOONOTIC INFORMATION (Species currently on IACUC approved protocols)

LABORATORY MICE and RATS

Modern laboratory mice are bred to exclude all zoonotic agents. Therefore, there is a limited concern for disease from these research mice. There is, however, always concern about secondary infections that can occur with bites and scratches. Common skin, intestinal, and soil bacteria on you or the animal can infect the scratch or bite wound and cause these secondary infections. Thus, handle all mice with care, always perform first aid (see Page 1), and seek medical consultation for severe wounds that appear to be infected.

Historically, rats have been known to carry a bacterium that causes Rat-Bite Fever. However, these bacteria have not been found in laboratory rats for decades due to the exceptional efforts of commercial suppliers to eliminate the bacteria from breeding colonies.

RABBITS

Modern laboratory rabbits contain few infectious pathogens. Of concern are scratches that can be inflicted with their strong hind legs and sharp claws or from bites. Secondary infection with common bacteria can be a result. Perform the first aid procedures (see Page 1) as needed and seek medical consultation for severe wounds.

GUINEA PIGS

Modern laboratory guinea pigs are susceptible to various viruses, bacteria, protozoa, and parasites. However, only a small number of organisms cause natural and clinical infections. Of concern are bacterial infections transmitted through bites and scratches. Common clinical manifestations include fever, headache, swollen lymph nodes, and rashes. Please refer to the First Aid procedure on page 1 of this document. Seek medical consultation for severe wounds.

HAMSTERS

Modern laboratory hamsters present a low risk of zoonotic disease transmission to humans. However, some diseases can be transmitted to humans through bites and scratches. Handling the hamsters gently and carefully will help minimize the risk of bites and scratches. Please refer to the First Aid procedure on page 1 of this document. Seek medical consultation for severe wounds.

PIGS

Bites from pigs present a risk similar to that from rabbits. First aid procedures from Page 1 should be followed, and the employee should contact Occupational USA Industrial Health Clinic (660-5910) for consultation.