

FACT SHEET: Laboratory Animal Allergies

Awareness and Prevention



Animal allergies are among the most common conditions affecting individuals who work with laboratory animals. Typically, allergies to animals result from repeated exposure to an animal's dander, urine, saliva, serum, or other body tissues. Symptoms can range from mild (e.g., itchy or runny nose and eyes) to severe (e.g., shortness of breath or red, itchy wheals on skin).

NEED TO KNOW:

1. Employees who work with or around lab animals are at an increased risk for developing allergies.
2. It is important to understand sources of allergens, your risk, potential routes of exposure and how to protect yourself.
3. N95 respirators can be used voluntarily with proper fit testing and documentation. Please talk to your manager, then contact OEHS to start the process.
4. If you develop allergic symptoms, please complete an Employee Incident Report.
5. Contact OEHS at oehs@tulane.edu for animal allergies concerns.

MORE INFO:



WHAT ARE ANIMAL ALLERGIES?

Animal allergens are proteins found in animal tissues and waste. With repeated exposure, an individual may develop an allergic reaction, (e.g., rashes, watering and redness of eyes, sore throat, cough, etc), which is an exaggerated response by the immune system to a foreign protein. Allergies can take weeks, months or years to develop. More serious cases can lead to asthma or an extreme allergic response to even a tiny exposure.

HOW ARE YOU EXPOSED?

- Allergens can be released into the air when dander or fur is shed from the animals, or during procedures that generate aerosols, (e.g., cage changing, cage dumping and washing).
- Through **skin or eye contact**.
- Through **breaks in the skin** (e.g., animal bites).

ARE YOU AT RISK?

Individuals who work with lab animals, around lab animals, or in rooms where lab animals are present are at an increased risk for developing allergies. Up to 44% of animal workers develop allergic symptoms during their career. Employees with a history of other allergies or exposure to tobacco smoke have higher risk.

! HOW TO REDUCE YOUR EXPOSURE:

Engineering Controls:

- Use ventilated hoods (any time you open a cage).
- Active ventilation and filtration systems.

Work Practice Controls:

- Minimizes aerosolization and cross contamination in all tasks.
- Wash hands and exposed skin after handling animals, at breaks, and at the end of work.
- Keep work surfaces in the animal area clean by wet wiping and mopping after use.
- Store work clothes and shoes at work to prevent carrying allergens home.
- Shower and shampoo hair daily (allergens can cling to hair).
- Employees with diagnosed animal allergies must be enrolled in the Respiratory Protection Program.

Personal Protection Equipment (PPE Controls):

- Use PPE to reduce skin and eye exposure (e.g., masks, gloves, goggles, gowns, hair bonnets and sleeve covers).
- Respirators, such as N95, can be used voluntarily to reduce the chance of developing allergies.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- University of Washington: [Laboratory Animal Allergies](#)
- NIH: [Laboratory Animal Allergies](#)
- Duke University [Laboratory Safety Manual – Use of Laboratory Animals](#)
- ERJ: [Laboratory animal allergy is preventable in modern research facilities](#)