



The ACC Connection

Volume 3, no. 3, MAY / JUNE 2007

WELCOME to the eighth edition of the **ACC Connection**, a bi-monthly newsletter designed to help researchers with questions regarding animal research at the University of Connecticut Health Center. Our eighth issue is designed to familiarize animal users with the occupational health surveillance program at the University of Connecticut Health Center and the necessity of the program. Federal law (*Public Health Service Policy on the Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*) requires that all personnel who use animals be enrolled in a health surveillance program. It has been decided by UCHC that no animal care and use protocol will be approved until all individuals listed on the protocol have enrolled in the occupational health and safety program. The UCHC policy can be found at the following website: http://www.policies.uchc.edu/policies/policy_2005.

Standards and Guidelines

For many years, the NIH and other federal funding bodies have required that research facilities provide an occupational health program for those who work with research animals. In 1997, the National Research Council (NRC) published *Occupational Health and Safety in the Care and Use of Research Animals*, which established the standards for Occupational Health Programs in research facilities. The objective was to promote occupational health and safety by recognizing and considering hazards and health risks associated with the care and use of research animals. The report differed somewhat from previous reports, though it affirmed prudent practices which were developed in previous reports.

Are the standards new?

The biggest difference between the 1997 guideline and older guidelines is the concept of **increased risk**. It is not the number of hours an individual works with animals (e.g., determining if individuals meet "substantial animal contact" definitions) that determines their participation in the program anymore. The recommendation was that every institution "initiate a concerted effort to address the health and safety hazards associated with the care and use of research animals and broaden its occupational health and safety program as necessary to reduce the risks to an acceptable level." The number of contact hours with research animals was deemed **not to be a sufficient indicator** of the need for health surveillance; substantial contact should be based on the hazards associated with the care and use of research animals.

It was also recommended that every institution develop a multidisciplinary approach to occupational health and safety that permits the continuing evaluation of potential workplace hazards and the risks to the employees who work with animals. This risk assessment should include frequency of contact, intensity of exposures, hazards associated with the animals being handled, hazardous properties of the agents being used in the research being conducted, the susceptibility of the individual employee, the hazard-control measures that are in place, and the occupational history of each individual employee.

Who is at increased risk?

An employee or student is at "increased risk" if they are exposed to vertebrate animals in a way that gives them an increased risk of an occupational illness (such as a **zoonotic diseases**), **physical injury**, or **allergies**. Most people who work with animals **are** at increased risk of animal related illness. The recommendations of the NRC is that participation in the occupational health surveillance program not be limited to full-time employees who are involved in the care and use of animals, but to **all personnel** involved in the care and use of research animals based upon the basis of risks encountered.

Who must enroll in the program?

All employees who work with laboratory animals must enroll in the occupational health program. This includes Principal Investigators, post-doctoral fellows, research assistants, graduate students, part-time employees, volunteers, summer students, and special employees.

Who is responsible for the Occupational Health Program for individuals who work with laboratory animals?

The Institution- UCHC, represented by its Institutional Official (IO), has ultimate responsibility for providing a healthful and safe work environment. The IO must have an adequate understanding of all the issues in the Occupational Health Program. Institutional management is the key element required for developing and sustaining any useful occupational health and safety program.

Principal Investigators- An effective program relies on the involvement and commitment of managers at all levels. They should disseminate knowledge about the program to all personnel who work in their laboratories. PIs sign an assurance in the animal use protocol that they will make sure that all their personnel will enroll in the occupational health surveillance program.

Employees- All employees must take responsibility for their own health and safety and for the safety of others around them. This requires that employees should follow standard procedures, all applicable policies, and be knowledgeable about the risks they are working with. A truly successful program will ultimately depend on the participation of all employees.

Animal Care Committee- It is the responsibility of the ACC to ensure that there is a program at the institution. The ACC office is charged with keeping a record of all individuals enrolled in the occupational health surveillance program and notifying employees of their occupational health enrollment status.

Employee Health Service- It is the responsibility of EHS to enroll individuals into the occupational health program. Employees are ***strongly encouraged*** to discuss surveillance with a health care professional at EHS who will be able to advise each individual, in the context of their particular health status, about the risks associated with working with laboratory animals and other risks identified in the ACC protocol.

What is the ideal program?

There is no such thing as the "ideal" occupational health and safety program. But it can be said that protecting the health and safety of employees engaged in the care and use of research animals is a cooperative undertaking that requires the active participation of institutional senior management, scientists who plan and carry out research involving experimental animals, individuals responsible for the management of animal care and use programs, health and safety professionals, and the individual employees who share the responsibility for their own health and safety and for the health and safety of those they work with.

Enrollment in the Occupational Health Surveillance Program

Enrollment in the program is not difficult. The University of Connecticut Health Center has tried to balance the needs and preferences of the researchers with the federal requirement that all personnel who use laboratory animals to be enrolled in a health surveillance program. Please be aware, however, that investigator needs will not outweigh adherence to federal law.

1. Make a copy of the Mandatory Annual Certification of Enrollment form (MACE). The MACE can be found on the website (<http://clacc.uhc.edu/ACC/OccHealthandSafetywithAnimals.htm>).
2. Everyone who is listed on an animal care and use protocol must fill out the form ***completely*** and send it, as a hard copy, to ***Employee Health Service (MC-6210)***.
3. Decide if you want to ***participate*** in medical surveillance or not: it is ***HIGHLY RECOMMENDED*** that you participate in surveillance. If you know you want to participate in surveillance, or if you wish to consult about participation, you must go to EHS for an appointment. To do so, call EHS at x8005. If no one answers, leave a message stating that you are enrolling in the occupational health surveillance program and would like an appointment. Also leave your name, your department, and an extension. EHS will call you back and set up an appointment. At this appointment, you will be able to discuss surveillance with a health care professional who will be able to advise each individual, in the context of their particular health status, about the risks associated with working with laboratory animals and other risks identified in the ACC protocol that you bring to the discussion. ***Bring the completed MACE with you to the EHS appointment.***
4. Protecting yourself with personal protective equipment (PPE), including respirators, is ***HIGHLY RECOMMENDED*** whether you participate in surveillance or not. If you chose to protect yourself with a respirator or other protective equipment, you should consult with EHS, or with the Biological Safety Officer (BSO), about how to do this. For respirators, the UCHC follows OSHA requirements for medical clearance and fit testing although your choice to wear a respirator is strictly voluntary. Medical clearance for respirators is separate from the surveillance and involves filling out a different questionnaire which should be taken to your medical surveillance consultation along with the MACE. Respirator

fit testing and training is performed by the Office of Research Safety and is done after written medical clearance is received from EHS. You may also send the Respiratory Questionnaire (<http://ors.uchc.edu/ehs/Q-resp-en.pdf>) **directly to EHS (MC-6210)** without visiting there, but if you wish to participate in OHS surveillance you must visit EHS.

5. Should you decide **not to participate** in medical surveillance, you may do so without speaking with EHS. You will still need to fill out the MACE, sign that you have read the materials about the program (located on the web at <http://clacc.uchc.edu/ACC/OccHealthandSafetywithAnimals.htm>), and that you understand the risks in your research and wish to decline participation. **Send the completed form to EHS (MC-6210) in an envelope marked confidential.**

6. The MACE form will need to be filled out annually to maintain enrollment in the program. Whether you participate in surveillance or not, this process will **enroll** you in the Occupational Health Surveillance Program for Animal Users, which is required by federal law governing the use of animals at the UCHC.

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I decide whether or not to participate in the program?

UCHC strongly encourages individuals to participate in the program when they enroll. All individuals should perform a risk assessment, which is based on the species they are using and can be performed on the ACC website at: (<http://clacc.uchc.edu/ACC/Occupational%20Health%20and%20Safety/HazardAssessment.htm>). They should consult with the Biological Safety Officer if the protocol they are using involves any chemical or physical hazards. They should consult with EHS about their own personal health conditions which might affect their health on the job. Ultimately, it is a personal choice that should be decided after appropriate considerations of the hazards of the protocol(s) being used and health consequences to each individual. Individual employees have responsibility for their own health and safety.

I have heard that new personnel won't be added to a protocol until they have enrolled. Is this true?

Yes. Modifications to add personnel to an approved animal care and use protocol will not be approved until the individuals have enrolled in the occupational health surveillance program. On a similar note, annual reviews will not be approved by the ACC until all individuals involved with the protocol have enrolled in the occupational health surveillance program and new protocols will also not be approved until all individuals have enrolled.

Do I mail the MACE to the ACC office? The BSO office?

No. **Forms sent to the ACC office or BSO office will be returned to the sender.** They will not be forwarded to EHS. **Please mail the forms to EHS at MC-6210.**

Is this all new?

Yes and No. UCHC has always had an occupational health surveillance program for individuals who used laboratory animals, but it was not required that all individuals using laboratory animals enroll in it. However, PHS Policy is clear that all individuals who use laboratory animals **must be enrolled** in a health program. Therefore, UCHC made the decision to make **enrollment** in the program mandatory but **participation** in the surveillance program voluntary in September 2005.

Is this a one-time only process?

No. **Annual enrollment in the program is required.** The MACE will need to be filled out on an annual basis. Whether you participate in surveillance or not, this process will **enroll** you in the Occupational Health Surveillance Program for Animal Users.

How long does it take to get enrolled in the program?

It depends on whether or not you are participating in the program. For those who wish to participate, an appointment is required at EHS and that may take a week or so to be scheduled. For those who do not wish to participate, they need to fill out the MACE and mail it to EHS which should not take much time at all. Please note that confirmation from EHS is the documentation the ACC office needs in order to determine whether or not an individual has enrolled in the occupational health program and it is the responsibility of each individual to ensure that EHS receives their MACE form.

If you have questions you'd like to see answered in future issues, please send them to pohl@uchc.edu and we will do our best to answer as many questions as possible.

Upcoming Training, May 2007 – June 2007

New Animal Users Initial Basic Core Training

Monday, May 21
Monday, June 18

9:00 am – 12:00 pm
9:00 am – 12:00 pm

Building 20 conference room
Building 20 conference room

New Institutional, State, or Federal Regulations

Institutional

ACC Policy	3/29/07	Policy on Annual Reviews and Expired Protocols. To view policy, go to: http://clacc.uhc.edu/ACC/Policies/AnnualExpired.htm
ACC Policy	3/29/07	Policy on Food Placement for Impaired Rodents. To view policy, go to: http://clacc.uhc.edu/ACC/Policies/Food.htm
ACC Policy	4/26/07	Revised policy on Animal Training Requirements. To view policy, go to: http://clacc.uhc.edu/ACC/Policies/AnimalTrainRequirements.htm
ACC Policy	4/26/07	Policy on Transferring Animals to Holding Protocols. To view policy, go to: http://clacc.uhc.edu/ACC/Policies/AnimalTransbreedandholding.htm

State

None

Federal

None



Next Issue: Protocol / Modification Review

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