

Background and Purpose

Federal guidelines require the University to provide an occupational health program for all individuals with occupational exposure to vertebrate animals. The URI Research Occupational Health Program (the Program) is an essential part of the overall program of animal care and use; is consistent with federal, state, and local regulations; and is focused on maintaining a safe and healthy workplace. The program is operated jointly by URI Office of Research Integrity (ORI), URI Environmental Health and Safety (EHS), and URI Health Services.

Policy

All personnel and students who work directly with animals in research and / or teaching environments are required to participate in the Program prior to commencing work with animals. Personnel and students who enter animal research and / or teaching environments but have very limited or no animal contact (e.g., contractors, visiting scientists, visitors, maintenance personnel) need not participate in the Program, but they must remain under the direct supervision of trained URI staff.

The supervisor or instructor is responsible for informing individuals of potential occupational health risks. This includes referring the individual to participate in the Program when work involves a new occupational health risk. Approval of IACUC protocols and access to URI animal facilities will be granted only after the requirements of the Program are met.

The Program consists of the following elements:

Training

Personnel and students are required to complete species-specific training; facility orientation (as applicable), which includes information on facility-specific personal protective equipment, use of engineering controls, and safety/incident reporting; and other EHS training courses associated with their position and duties. Species-specific training is completed through online courses. Facility orientation is conducted in-person.

Health Form

Personnel and students who work with animals in research and / or teaching environments are required to complete the Health Questionnaire for Animal Research and Laboratory Facilities Access prior to commencing work and every three years thereafter. In some cases, URI Health Services may require more frequent completion of the health form.

The intent of the form is to protect the health of individuals who work with or around animals. Medical surveillance for personnel and students provides individuals professional medical advice should they have any concerns about allergies or exposure to animals. Although it is not recommended, there is an option not to disclose medical information. The completed forms will be reviewed by URI Health Services and kept confidential in URI Health Services' HIPAA-compliant patient portal.

Medical Surveillance and Immunizations

Based on the responses to the Health Questionnaire for Animal Research and Laboratory Facilities Access, URI Health Services may recommend risk specific preventive measures (e.g., respirators), immunizations, additional tests, and/or health monitoring. The Program recommends that all personnel and students who work with animals in research and / or teaching environments maintain up-to-date tetanus vaccination and personnel and students working with wild caught mammals receive a rabies vaccination series and a titer check every two years. Other services may be recommended and are at the discretion of URI Health Services. Individuals may opt out of some of the services, but other preventive measures may be required.

References

National Research Council. (2011). *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals: Eighth Edition.* <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/olaw/guide-for-the-care-and-use-of-laboratory-animals.pdf>

National Research Council. (1997). *Occupational Health and Safety in the Care and Use of Research Animals.* Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/4988>