

University of Tennessee
Occupational Health Program

Information for Visitors, Maintenance Personnel, and Contractors

Visitors, including contractors, **must report to the Animal Facility Manager** before entering animal housing or procedure areas. While in the facilities, direct contact with animals, their waste, or other potentially contaminated materials should be avoided.

Laboratory Animal Facility Hazards

There are certain risks involved when visiting the laboratory animal facilities at UT. In general, health and safety matters are related to animal species, the frequency and type of contact, facility and equipment design, human behavior, and each person's health status.

For the occasional visitor who does not have direct contact with or handle the animals, **allergic reactions are the most common hazards.**

Allergic Reactions

Allergic reactions to animals are among the most common conditions that adversely affect the health of workers exposed to animals in research. All personnel should be aware that laboratory animals, particularly rats, rabbits, guinea pigs, and hamsters are sources of potent allergens. Products from animals that may induce allergic reactions are animal skin, dander, fur, urine, and saliva. The route of exposure is most often due to airborne allergens; however, contact allergies are common. Depending on the exposure, the allergic reaction may induce respiratory symptoms, itchy eyes, and rashes. Symptoms usually evolve after repeated exposure; however allergic reactions may happen on first exposure.

Development of aerosols and dust should be avoided when working around animals. Work practices and personal protective equipment can reduce the potential development and severity of allergies.

If you notice symptoms of an allergic reaction such as a skin rash or hives, itchy eyes, or difficulty breathing while in the animal facility, you should notify your supervisor and the facility manager.

Physical Hazards

Hazards such as **slippery floors, excessive noise, sharp objects, hot surfaces and many other conditions** may be present in the facility. Precautionary measures should be taken where these hazards occur.

Biohazards

Biohazards include infectious agents (bacteria, viruses, fungi, or parasites), biological toxins, and diagnostic material (blood, body fluids, etc.). Biohazards may be transmitted by contact, inhalation, or ingestion. If any known pathogens are present in a room in the facility, **there will be a warning sign** describing the hazards and recommended protection measures posted on the door.

Radioisotopes

Radioisotopes are radioactive forms of normally non-radioactive elements and they emit low levels of radiation. Usually these types of isotopes are dangerous only if contacted directly. If radioisotopes are present in a room within the facility, **there will be a warning sign** describing the hazard and recommended protection measures posted on the door.

Hazard Containment

Eating, drinking, smoking, chewing (gum or tobacco products) or the application of cosmetics are not permitted in the facility. Personnel should avoid touching their eyes, face, mouth, or other body surfaces with contaminated hands or gloves.

Protective Clothing

Individuals exposed to animals, their waste, or other products **must wear protective clothing.** A lab coat or gown must be worn when entering an animal room or other areas with potential contamination. A person with animal allergies may need to wear a mask.

Used protective clothing and devices should not be worn outside the facility. Disposable protective clothing should be discarded when soiled.

Personal Hygiene

Handwashing is a crucial activity for safeguarding personnel in the facility. Hands should be washed after contact with animals, their waste or with contaminated or potentially contaminated surfaces and materials, and after removal of gloves. Hands should be routinely washed before eating, drinking, applying cosmetics, before touching contact lenses, and before leaving the facility.

Effective hand washing consists of at least a 20 second lathering with soap and water.

Hearing Protection

Noise levels may reach potentially damaging levels in certain areas of the facility, especially in dog housing rooms and in cage wash areas. **Hearing protection devices are available** in the facility and should be worn by personnel entering these areas.

Additional information

Contact the animal facility manager or the Occupational Health Nurse (865-755-8924) for additional information.