Transporting Rodents to and from Research Laboratories

Purpose
The microbiological status (health status) of rodent colonies can have a profound effect on research results and should therefore be carefully monitored and controlled. One of the greatest means for potential cross contamination of rodent pathogens is the transportation and use of animals in investigator laboratories for experimental procedures. This policy describes procedures investigators must follow in order to minimize cross contamination during transport between animal facilities and investigator laboratories. The procedures also minimize the allergen exposure to personnel working with and around rodents.

Background
Rodent transportation is a possible source of contamination for the rodent colony. It is also a possible source of allergen exposure for the human population. In order to safeguard both rodents and humans in working in laboratories, precautions must be taken. In addition, transporting research animals through public spaces may draw unwanted attention to the research animals, the animal facility, the laboratory where procedures are carried out and the researchers carrying out the work. It is essential that all personnel transporting animals do not draw attention to the animals being transported and that the transport is conducted in a campus-approved manner.

Policy
Rodents are transported in filter-topped cages (one exception is for guinea pigs who are not normally housed in filter-topped caging; they may be transported in secure pet carriers). The filter tops are taped on the cage for transport. Transport must occur in a climate controlled vehicle with a minimum of stops; a cart may be used in place of a vehicle for very short distances in mild weather only but the cages must be appropriately covered to avoid drawing attention to the animals. No eating, drinking, or smoking is permitted while transporting animals. A university-owned vehicle is preferred for transport, but a privately owned vehicle is allowed (but discouraged) for rodent transport. The caging/transport containers must be covered from view of the public using a lab coat, cloth, fabric drape or similar items for covering the cages. Plastic bags must never be used to cover cages/containers during transport because they restrict air flow and place the animals at risk. Since some vivaria do not allow in and out traffic of animals it is essential to check with your facility manager/technician-in-charge regarding your specific situation. Please also see the Attending Veterinarian’s Standard of Care (SC-20-108) regarding animal transportation.

Procedures
A. Ensure you are allowed to remove and return your animals.

1. Ensure your procedure/lab space is listed on your animal care and use protocol before moving any animals.

2. Due to possible cross-contamination, ensure movement between your procedure/lab space and other procedure space has been approved by the Health Monitoring Coordinator.

B. Rodent cage/transport container dimensions are determined based on the number and weight of the animals and comparable to their normal housing cage size.

1. Rodents may not be overcrowded for transport.

2. For example, 8 mice may not be placed into a cage designed to house 4-5 mice for transport to laboratories or a procedure space.

C. The cage is fitted with a filter top for transport.

1. The water bottle is turned upside down to ensure it does not drip water into the cage during transport.
   - Standard microisolators will have the water bottle flipped and then the top affixed.
   - Some Individually Ventilated Caging (IVC) bottles are external to the tops thus they must be turned after the top is affixed.
   - For BioZone caging the metal top is removed and a standard feeder, water bottle, and filter top are affixed for transport.

2. The filter top is taped on with lab tape or equivalent.

3. Cage cards remain affixed to the cage and must accompany the animals
   - Do not put cards inside the cages as the rodents may destroy them.

4. Once the filter top is taped to the top of the cage the animals must be covered for transport with breathable fabric or a paper covering dedicated for animal use only.
   - The covering must be clean and may not be taken into the animal facility.
   - See the Health Monitoring Coordinator for further details or assistance.

D. A cart may be used for very short distances during temperate weather only.

1. Rodents are extremely sensitive to hot and cold temperatures.

2. A climate controlled vehicle must be used in hot or cold or rainy weather and/or when in populated areas where carrying or carting them would draw attention to the animals or the animal facility.

E. Vehicle transport

1. A coat, lab bench paper, or other barrier must be placed between the cages and the upholstery or floor. Use a seat belt to secure the cages as necessary.

2. Animals should not be transported in the trunk or non-climate controlled area of the vehicle, or the bed of a pickup. Exceptions may be permitted for field study animals if described in a protocol and approved by the IACUC. Temperature, season, and time of day must be considered to minimize animal welfare concerns.

3. Smoking, eating, or drinking when animals are in the vehicle is not allowed.
4. During transport of animals, stops are not allowed (i.e., drive-through at a bank or restaurant). Animal transport must be direct. Animals must never be left unattended in a vehicle.

5. When using a personal vehicle to transport animals, non-university affiliated individuals should not be in the vehicle during transport.

6. The vehicle's climate control must be used as needed to keep the temperature comfortable for the animals.

7. A bicycle cannot be used for transport.

F. When animals arrive in the laboratory or other approved destination: Filter tops must remain in place at all times, except when the animals are being removed from or returned to cages. Filter tops are removed and animals are manipulated in laboratories or other approved areas only. Animals may not be taken into eating areas, restrooms, common areas, office areas, or other non-laboratory/non-animal use space.

1. Manipulation in a biosafety cabinet is strongly preferred, with the understanding that not all manipulations can be performed in a biosafety cabinet or hood.

2. Laminar flow/"Clean Benches" (i.e., clean benches that direct HEPA-filtered air from back to front across the bench and thus directly toward the lab worker) are not appropriate for rodent manipulations as they can disperse allergens directly toward the researcher.

G. Return to the vivarium

1. Return must be accomplished as described above.

2. Each vivarium will have a preferred method of reintroduction of animals and caging into the vivarium.
   - This may involve the disinfection of the outside of cages and possibly fresh caging for the rodents.
   - See your vivarium or your facility manager for the appropriate methods.

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Contact

IACUC-Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee
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More information
/institutional-animal-care-and-use-staff-listing [1]

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