Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) When Working with Animals in Investigator Laboratories and Related Facilities

Purpose
The purpose of this policy is to describe the minimum personal protective equipment (PPE) required for working with research animals in laboratories and animal facilities. The purpose of PPE is two-fold. First, it ensures potential allergens and other hazards do not have direct contact with the investigator. Second, PPE minimizes the exposure of research animals to potential human contaminants.

Policy
Working with rodents requires at minimum a lab coat and disposable gloves. Working with other small mammals requires the use of a lab coat or other dedicated protective clothing (i.e., scrubs, uniform). Aquatics may be handled with clean hands or non-powdered gloves depending on the species. A lab coat is also recommended.

PPE and university supplied uniforms cannot be taken home and must be laundered on-site or by a commercial university-approved laundry service.

Individual facilities and/or specialized laboratories may have additional requirements. PPE requirements for animal housing areas and field situations are described in the Attending Veterinarian Standards of Care “Animal Care Program Personal Protective Equipment Policy” [1].

When working in a laboratory or animal facility appropriate footwear, which consists of closed-toe and closed-back shoes, must be worn at all times.

Procedure
PPE for rodents includes a clean lab coat and gloves. A disposable lab coat is preferred over a cloth lab coat but either will fulfill the intent of the policy. Soiled lab coats must be removed and placed in an appropriate receptacle for laundering. PPE is required at all times when the cages are open. For most rodents (e.g., mouse, rat, hamster, peromyscus, gerbil, vole) this is when the filter top is removed to access the animal. For guinea pigs, this is when handling the animal, as they are not routinely housed or transported in filter-topped caging.
PPE required for small mammals other than rodents includes a lab coat or dedicated clothing. Rabbits should be handled wearing a disposable lab coat if at all possible to avoid contamination with fur. Traditional cloth lab coats that are contaminated with rabbit fur must be placed in an appropriate receptacle and turned in for laundering. Cats, dogs, and other small mammals must be handled wearing a lab coat or dedicated clothing.

PPE must not be worn out of the work area. PPE must not be worn in break rooms, bathrooms, or other non-animal procedure or non-laboratory space. PPE must be disposable or maintained clean and laundered by a commercial university-approved laundering service. Dirty PPE must not be used to handle animals. Under no circumstances should dirty or soiled lab coats be reused.

PPE for nonhuman primates is established by facility standard operating procedures and must be adhered to at all times.

Always wash your hands when you have removed your PPE and are leaving the animal work areas and facilities.

References
1. ILAR Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, Eight Edition
2. Occupational Health and Safety in the Care and Use of Research Animals

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