

Policies and Procedures

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CHAPTER: Animal Occupational Health and Safety Program	ISSUED: 08/2010	REV. A: 8/2016	REV. B:	REV. C:
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6.0 Allergies

Some people develop allergies to the animals with which they work. Some studies have shown that from 10% to 44% of individuals who work with animals have animal allergies. Participants who are allergic to a species with which they work can suffer significant health risks.

Allergic individuals may display any of a number of symptoms including allergic rhinitis (a condition characterized by runny nose and sneezing similar to hay fever), allergic conjunctivitis (irritation and tearing of the eyes), asthma (characterized by wheezing and shortness of breath), or contact dermatitis (a red, bumpy rash that may appear where the skin touches the animal). Individuals usually develop symptoms over a period of exposure of 1-2 years. It is estimated that occupation-related asthma arises in 10% of persons with allergic disease who work with laboratory animals. Occupation-related asthma may cause symptoms while the individual is exposed to the animals but can also lead to chronic symptoms (lasting months or years) after exposure ceases.

Individuals who work with animals may be allergic to any animal species. The allergens are proteins that are excreted in the animals' saliva, urine, and from various glands associated with the skin. The proteins become associated with the animal's hair and dander. The allergens are unique to each species of animal, so it is possible to be allergic to mice and not to rats and vice versa. It is also possible to be allergic to multiple species. A person who is already allergic to one allergen (animal or otherwise) has a greater chance of becoming allergic to a new allergen than a person who has no allergies at all.

An individual could potentially be allergic to almost any animal. The animals most commonly associated with workplace allergies are mice and rats (the most common laboratory animals).

Those who work with animals should be aware of the signs and symptoms of animal allergies. Allergies can often be managed by a combination of medical management and workplace strategies. Participants with potential allergy symptoms should consult with a physician to determine the cause of the allergy in order to manage it effectively and to determine its effect on current and future health.