

University of Massachusetts/Amherst Laboratory Occupational Health Program For Pathogenic Agents



The Occupational Health Program is designed to inform individuals who work with animals about potential zoonoses (diseases of animals transmissible to humans), personal hygiene, and other potential hazards associated with animal exposure. This information is directed toward those involved in the care and use of laboratory animals.

How to Protect Yourself

- **Wash your hands.** The single most effective preventative measure that can be taken is thorough, regular hand washing. Wash hands and arms after handling any animal. Never smoke, drink or eat in the animal rooms or before washing your hands.
- **Wear gloves.** When working with animals wear appropriate gloves for the task and wash your hands after removing gloves.
- **Wear respiratory protection.** Respirators should be worn when there is a risk of aerosol transmission of a zoonotic agent or when there is a medical history of allergies. You must be enrolled in the Respiratory Protection Program. Contact EH&S for assistance. A health assessment will be done by UHS and fit testing of a respirator is done at Environmental Health & Safety.
- **Wear other protective clothing.** Lab coats should be available and worn when working. Avoid wearing street clothes while working with animals. Lab coats should be laundered through the lab coat program.
- **Seek Medical Attention Promptly.** If you are injured on the job, promptly report the accident to your supervisor and EH&S, even if it seems relatively minor. Minor cuts, abrasions and all bites should be immediately cleansed with antibacterial soap and then protected from exposure to animals. For more serious injuries or if there are any questions, contact Employee Health Services.
- **Tell your physician you work with animals.** Whenever you are ill, even if you're not certain that the illness is work-related, always mention to your physician if you work with animals or in a laboratory. Many zoonotic diseases have flu-like symptoms and would not normally be suspected. Your physician needs this information to make an accurate diagnosis. Questions regarding personal human health should be answered by your physician.
- **Vaccination may be available** depending upon the animals you work with and the agents that may be used in the experiments.
- **Know what you are working with.** Your supervisor or PI should tell you the specific hazards you are working with. Know the signs and symptoms of the disease and be aware of any changes in your health status.