Laboratory Animal Allergies

Allergic reactions are among the most common conditions affecting the health of workers caring for research animals. An allergy is an exaggerated reaction by the body’s immune system to proteins. The proteins most frequently associated with laboratory animals are found in the animal’s urine, saliva and dander.

Prevention of allergy symptoms is a major goal of the medical surveillance program for animal handlers. Completion of the Questionnaire assists occupational medical staff in assessing your potential for allergies to occur. Early recognition of allergy symptoms and sensitization can lead to interventions to reduce exposure and avoid long-term health consequences. Allergic conditions include asthma, dermatitis, conjunctivitis, and rhinitis.

The use of provided and/or prescribed personal protective equipment is important for the prevention of animal allergies. This includes the use of gloves, lab coats and possibly respiratory protection when there is contact with research animals and their waste. The proper use of engineering controls in animal care areas is also very important. Examples include ventilation systems for animal work, ventilated animal cage systems and waste dumping areas.

If you experience any of the following conditions associated with animal allergies, it is important to report them to your supervisor and report to the Occupational Health Services clinic for immediate evaluation.

**Asthma** – A chronic lung disease causing inflammation and narrowing of the airways with recurrent periods of wheezing, chest tightness, shortness of breath and coughing.

**Dermatitis** – An inflammation or rash of the skin.

**Conjunctivitis** – An inflammation or redness of the lining of the eyeball or eyelid, resulting in discomfort or a scratchy sensation, swelling of the eyelid and a discharge or watering of the eye.

**Rhinitis** – An allergic reaction affecting the mucous lining of the nose.