



Laboratory Animal Allergy information leaflet

Introduction

Up to a quarter of people who regularly work with small mammals and insects develop allergic reactions to proteins secreted in animal urine, dander, or excreta.

Someone who already has asthma or a history of allergic conditions like hay fever or eczema may be at greater risk in the short term, but no one working with laboratory animals is immune.

People at risk

All persons working with laboratory animals are at risk, even if allergy has never been a problem before. The risk is not confined to animal care technicians. Researchers, maintenance staff and anyone involved in the handling of waste materials from animal laboratories can be affected.

Symptoms

- Eyes:** Itching; watering; redness; swollen eyelids
- Nose:** Itching; runny nose; sneezing episodes
- Skin:** Itching; cracked skin; small blisters; nettle rash (urticaria); a 'weal & flare' reaction (swelling & inflammation) if scratched.
- Lungs:** Coughing/wheezing; chest tightness; shortness of breath

Eye, nasal and most skin symptoms tend to occur during work.

Asthma symptoms may not occur until some hours after exposure

If you experience **any** of these symptoms, **report it!**

What to do if symptoms develop

Please report immediately to your Line Manager and/or Faculty Services Manager for further advice or investigation

Prevention

Correctly designed and maintained ventilation systems help to minimize worker exposure to laboratory animal allergens as does the appropriate use of protective clothing and equipment.

Protective clothing, overshoes, head covering or Respiratory Protective Equipment (RPE) may also be provided to protect individuals from exposure to allergens.

On first entry to an Animal Unit you will be given full details of any protective clothing or RPE you will be required to wear in that area.

Health surveillance

Health surveillance is essential for all employees/students who are likely to be exposed to animal allergens. At the University of Auckland health surveillance includes a questionnaire to find out about past or present respiratory problems. You will be asked to complete this questionnaire as a pre-employment health survey for staff or before gaining access to animal units in the case of researchers/students.

Subsequent checks will then be carried out on an annual basis whilst exposure continues. Health and Safety Advisor will advise individuals, their Line Managers and Animal Unit Managers of any resultant recommendations.

Failure to comply with health surveillance requirements may result in access to the Animal Unit being withdrawn.

Case management

If an affected person needs to continue to work with animals, even on a temporary basis, then this should only be considered after consultation with the medical specialist. Appropriate additional protection measures will be implemented as required, e.g. more frequent health surveillance, alternative forms of RPE and possible adaptations to working practices.