Animal Exposure Occupational Medicine Program

Introduction

A comprehensive program for the health and safety of those who work with and around laboratory animals is critical to USC’s research mission. In developing USC’s Laboratory Animal Occupational Medicine Program, stakeholders from an array of USC support and research departments played a role. Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S), the Department of Animal Resources (DAR), and the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) collaborated to produce this program. We consulted the most current NRC publications, Occupational Health and Safety in the Care and Use of Research Animals, the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, the most current CDC/NIH publication, Biosafety in Microbiological and Biomedical Laboratories, and AAALAC Guidelines.

Program Overview

Every three years, employees who have exposure to laboratory animals are offered the Animal Exposure Risk Assessment (ARA) through the Occupational Medicine Program. The risk assessment is designed to gather information about a person’s general health, immunocompetence, and propensity for allergies or asthma. This information is reviewed by an occupational medicine physician to determine if there are any health risks associated with an individual’s animal exposure. Those individuals who are determined to be at risk are given an opportunity for an in-person evaluation with a Keck Internal Medicine physician who will evaluate and explain the risk to the individual.

Besides individuals identified through an IACUC proposal, Department of Animal Resources individuals, contractors, and any research or support people who work with or around laboratory animals are also given an opportunity to participate in this program. USC individuals who are new to the program, completed the risk assessment over 3 years ago, or have recently started working with or around laboratory animals are given a risk assessment prior to working with animals. Visitors to the animal facilities are provided with a brief training and complete a form indicating that they understand the process. An individual may opt out of the risk assessment process but must do so in writing. An individual may change his or her mind and opt to participate at any time.

Risk Assessment Process

Individuals who have animal exposure are identified three ways, through the IACUC, through being a DAR employee, or identified by self or supervisor. Each individual listed on an IACUC protocol is reviewed for participation in the Animal Exposure Risk Assessment Program. Those who require a risk assessment are provided with information to complete the risk assessment.

The completed risk assessments are placed in envelopes that are sealed by the individual and sent to Biosafety Programs Occupational Medicine Program staff. The Biosafety Program staff sends a package of sealed envelopes to a contracted Occupational Medicine physician to review. The physician responds to the Biosafety Program stating that an individual is cleared to work with animals without restrictions or recommended to a Keck Internal Medicine physician for further evaluation. In rare cases the physician may have an additional or person-specific statement. HIPAA protected information is not transmitted to the Biosafety Program.

General Information

This program is funded through EH&S Biosafety Occupational Medicine Program and is free of charge to the USC individuals.

The link to this program is www.adminopsnet.usc.edu/department/environmental-health-safety/occupational-medicine-program