

October 26, 2006

HEALTH PROGRAM FOR RESEARCH PERSONNEL WITH ANIMAL CONTACT

1. **PURPOSE:** To establish South Texas Veterans Health Care System (STVHCS) policy, procedures, and responsibilities for an occupational health program for employees exposed to research animals.
2. **POLICY:** Personnel who may have substantial contact with animals, their tissues, fluids, or body products while actively participating in research endeavors within the Research Service will be included in a program designed to meet the accepted occupational safety requirements of this type of work.
3. **ACTION:**
 - a. **A pre-employment physical examination will be required that includes:**
 - (1) TB skin test (required of all STVHCS personnel). If the test is positive, further tests (e.g., chest x-ray) or follow-up will be determined by the Employee Health Physician.
 - (2) Tetanus-diphtheria immunization unless records of immunization are provided.
 - (3) Medical history to also include record of allergies, immunizations.
 - (4) Allergen survey (initial)
 - b. **Annual review:**
 - (1) TB skin test unless previously positive.
 - (2) Allergen survey. This program is coordinated by the Employee Health Physician. Supervisors will insure employees handling animals complete the annual survey on allergic symptoms. All surveys with affirmative answers will be forwarded to Employee Health Clinic for review. Employees with significant employment-related symptoms will be counseled as to how asthma and allergies may affect their health. Employee Health Physician will determine which employees need further evaluation and possible intervention.
 - c. **Immunizations--Employee's written refusal of immunization should be placed in the employee's records.**
 - (1) Tetanus-diphtheria. Booster immunization shall be given every ten years or promptly in the event of an animal bite.
 - (2) Pre-exposure rabies: Personnel exposed to carnivores and other animals highly susceptible to rabies shall receive pre-exposure rabies immunization. Follow-up titer tests should be performed as deemed necessary by the Employee Health Physician.
 - d. **Preventive procedures--All personnel working with animals must receive initial training on preventive procedures to include proper handling of animals, protective clothing and equipment, and hygiene practices. Supervisors must insure employees receive the required annual safety training. STVHCS and Research Service safety policies will be available in the Veterinary Medical Unit and all laboratories.**
 - e. **Special procedures--**

POLICY MEMORANDUM 151-06-05

(1) Animal Bites: If an individual is bitten by an animal, the animal should be immediately identified to Veterinary Medical Unit personnel for a 10-day observation. If the animal dies or develops signs without sufficient evidence for a definitive diagnosis, it will be sent for rabies diagnostic procedures. Infection Control Program Manager shall be notified at the time of occurrence

(2) In the event that specific hazards (biological, radiation, or chemical) are to be introduced into the areas served by VMU or into the animals themselves, specific additional procedures must be implemented for personnel protection. The research investigator shall be responsible for providing these procedures prior to initiation of the activities.

(a) Employees assigned to work with animals that are administered chemical carcinogens or radioactive substances are required to attend training sessions on the handling and safety precautions of these agents and substances.

(b) Employees assigned to work with ABSL3 agents are required to attend training sessions on the handling and safety precautions of each agent in the area. These training sessions are to be given by the principal investigator after the Biosafety Committee approval of the agent. When assigned to work in a biohazard area, employees must carefully follow the written Standard Operating Procedures in order to protect his/her own health and the health of others by containing the disease agent within the facility. Initial serum banking will be offered to employees working with these agents.

f. Program responsibilities:

(1) Chief, Human Resources Management Service (05), will establish appointment for initial health screening.

(2) Employee Health Physician (05) will establish and coordinate appropriate follow-up, referral, or treatment for each employee.

(3) ACOS for Research and Development (151) through the Veterinary Medical Unit supervise or will monitor employee and investigator compliance with health program policy.

4. REFERENCES: MP-5, Part I, Chapter 792, Change 7, June 30, 1980; Public Health Service National Institute of Health "Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals;" "Biosafety in Microbiological and Biomedical Laboratories;" National Research Council "Occupational Health and Safety in the Care and Use of Research Animals," 1997; and DVA VHA Handbook 1200.7, Appendix C, Occupational Health and Safety for Research Personnel with Animal Contact, 2005.

5. RESPONSIBILITY: Associate Chief of Staff for Research and Development (151)

6. RESCISSION: STVHCS Policy Memorandum 151-03-05 dated June 30, 2003

7. RECERTIFICATION: November 2009

(original signature on file)

TIMOTHY P. SHEA, FACHE
Director

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