

Emergency Preparedness in Animal Facilities and COVID-19

Many times emergency planning focuses on abrupt, short-term disasters such as a storm or fire. The spread of COVID-19 is a good reminder to incorporate planning for longer disruptions with marked personnel absenteeism. A few considerations for this planning is described below.

Animal care staff are generally considered essential personnel in the event of University closures. Animal care staff should notify their supervisor if they are unable to report to work during a closure. If insufficient personnel are available to attend to daily husbandry the Attending Veterinarian should be contacted to help coordinate alternate arrangements. If there is a question regarding whether a position with animal care responsibilities is considered essential, work with your Department Chair and HR representatives to clarify the issue.

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, “**Experts have not expressed concern about transmission to or from animals.** Multiple international and domestic health organizations have indicated that pets and other domestic animals are not considered at risk for contracting or spreading COVID-19.” Continue to use the personal protective equipment and the biosecurity measures recommended by your supervisor when handling animals.

Specific advice for facility managers, animal care supervisors, and Principle Investigators with satellite facilities:

- Clarify which positions are considered “essential” within your department or unit ahead of time to reduce confusion in the event of a university closure. Incorporate this into the animal facility disaster plan.
- Identify the minimum number for personnel needed to maintain animal care activities.
- Consider how modified work schedules could be adopted if the need arises. These could include rotating shifts, reduced hours, or allowing some duties that are traditionally performed on site to be performed remotely.
- Identify options to reduce workload while maintaining acceptable animal care if minimal or sub-optimal staffing was prolonged (altered cage change intervals, alternate bedding materials, etc.).
- Plan for conservative and efficient use of resources in case of supply shortages of feed, bedding, other husbandry consumables.
- Consider maintaining an additional supply of shelf-stable essential husbandry items.
- Consider contingencies if waste disposal services are disrupted.

Specific advice for research staff:

- Plan ahead for disruptions. In the event of a University closure on-going research may be delayed or curtailed to ensure minimal personnel are on campus to limit the spread of disease. Take time to consider contingencies for interrupted projects or activities.
- For those working with rodents, consider cryopreserving valuable or otherwise hard to replace genetic lines. Also this may be a good opportunity to re-evaluate your breeding colonies for older or nonproductive breeding animals to minimize overall animal numbers.
- For those working with rodents, designate an individual to regularly reassess and prioritize cages/lines for colonies maintained by the laboratory. Animal numbers need may need to be

reduced to accommodate prolonged understaffing. If this should occur then we will seek PI and lab input. This option would be exercised only if the impact on OSU is severe and prolonged.