IACUC FAQs COVID-19

**Will the Research Protections Office (RPO) continue to operate as usual?**
The RPO and its Committees are operating through modified procedures. RPO staff are working remotely and are conducting regularly scheduled and ad hoc meetings via online conferencing. On-site educational programs have been cancelled until further notice.

**The IACUC approved my new protocol and/or amendment, does that mean I can begin my work?**
The IACUC continues to conduct reviews and approvals. However, only research that has been deemed essential by the Vice President for Research may continue work in the labs. This is in accordance with Governor Phil Scott’s Stay Home, Stay Safe executive order which directed the closure of in-person operations for all non-essential business. This directive went into effect on March 25, 2020.

**My protocol approval is nearing expiration and I have not transitioned to UVMClick yet. What do I do? What will happen if my approval to use animals expires during the ramp down in research operations?**
The Transitional Support Team is still actively reaching out to PIs 4-6 weeks prior to protocol expiration. The transition from InfoEd to Click is still occurring remotely and on schedule during this time. Meetings with PIs regarding the transition are being conducted either over the phone or through Microsoft Teams as needed. It is important that you respond to emails from the Transitional Support Team regarding the transition in order to avoid protocol expiration.

The IACUC will continue to review and approve transitioned protocols from remote locations.

If your protocol does expire, your animals will be maintained and cared for on the OACM Holding Protocol. Under this protocol, routine husbandry and veterinary care (e.g., veterinary medical care; assessment of animal health and well-being; provision of food, water, and clean cages; maintenance of appropriate environmental conditions) will be provided, and per diems will be charged. However, no experimental procedures will be performed during this time.

**Who do I contact with animal-related compliance questions?**
RPO and the IACUC will continue to provide services remotely. Should you have any questions, please contact Aubrie Clas or Abbey Dattilio via email. They use Microsoft Teams to do virtual face-to-face meetings when needed.

**Animal Care**

**What plans are in place to ensure that the animals housed on campus will continue to receive care?**

The Office of Animal Care Management (OACM) will maintain mechanisms for providing continued daily care to all animals housed on campus in the event of a natural disaster or other
events that may interrupt normal business, including the COVID-19 situation. This includes continued veterinary medical care; assessment of animal health and well-being; provision of food, water, and clean cages; and maintenance of appropriate environmental conditions. Our top priority is to continue the provision of critical life support services that ensure animal welfare. With the closure of the University, animal care staff has begun an extended weekend schedule, with animal checks on Friday through Monday, and animal checks, cage changes, and cage wash on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

Will I be able to access the animals in my facility during a research hibernation?

All research buildings have been placed on restricted access (Monday – Friday lock/unlock schedule will be secured 24/7 until further notice). All occupants including staff, faculty, students, and contractors will be able to access card read doors with a valid CATCard. Access to the animal facilities by research personnel will continue for all those who currently have access in order to facilitate ongoing essential research functions.

Are there any restrictions on use of PPE in the animal facility?

These are some guidelines for conserving PPE during this time;

- OACM asks that you limit entering the animal facility even if you have approval to do essential research. This is in an effort to maintain social distancing standards as well as save PPE—multiple lab members should not gown up to go into animal rooms if your work can be completed by one lab member.
- If you are working in HSRF and then in Given, save your PPE from HSRF to wear in Given (remove before walking through corridors).
- **Limit your visits** to the animal facility by clustering your duties on specific days (e.g., every other day visits) when possible; if you need to enter the facility multiple times in the same day, please save and re-wear your PPE (not gloves).
- **Limit the number of lab members**
- If you find a **damaged PPE item (especially masks with broken ear-loops) please set aside for OACM to repair.** Ear loops can be re-glued.
- **DO NOT** cover cages on carts with new gowns; **cages should be covered with your used gown or a sheet/towel.**
- **DO NOT** take PPE from the Animal Facility for use elsewhere; there has been an increase in “missing” PPE in recent weeks.
- **Enlist OACM to help**—we are already in the facility and will work with a representative from your lab to assist with some tasks (weaning, separating, breeding, etc.) for a reduced fee.
- If you are entering a room just to retrieve a cage or quickly check something, please ask Animal Care for help—someone who is already gowned up can likely assist you.

How do I request veterinary care?

If you have an animal in need of immediate attention, the quickest means to get in touch with on-call veterinary staff is to locate an Animal Care staff member in your facility. If you are unable to locate someone in your facility:
During business hours (Tuesday-Thursday 7 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.), call the Veterinary Technician office at 802-656-8708

Outside of business hours, call Dr. Ida Washington at 425-592-2397 or Alyssa Frizzell at 802-528-9460.

**How will I be notified of any animal health issues during a hibernation in research operations?**

Animal Care team members (e.g., husbandry personnel, veterinarians, veterinary technicians) will reach out to the individual designated as the PI and/or Primary contact in your IACUC approved protocol with any animal health issues requiring attention. Notifications will be sent using the contact information (i.e., email address, phone number) provided in the protocol.

**What can I do now that the COVID-19 virus is disrupting my animal experiments?**

- Effective immediately, no additional studies/experiments or breedings may begin, unless specifically approved by your Dean and the VPR, so that we may minimize the number of animals requiring daily care (Note that IACUC approval processes remain intact for protocol changes and reviews).
- Orders for acquiring additional animals, as well as imports and exports, are no longer being accepted.

**What are the best methods for us to reduce our animal breeding colonies in response to the new directives?**

If you are suspending breeding of commercially-available animals, try to conserve the fewest number of animals needed to maintain the strain or line. **Specifically:**

- Remove male breeders from breeding cages and identify the male.
- Ideally, save the youngest weanlings of a strain (~3-5 weanlings, male and female in separate cages).
- Save one cage of female weanlings (3-5 weanlings, ideally 6-8 weeks old or youngest available) and label the cages with a “Save for Breeding” note.
- Save one cage of male weanlings (2-3 weanlings, ideally 6-8 weeks old or youngest available) and label the cages with a “Save for Breeding” note.
- If possible, recombine females into socially-housed cages (up to 5 per cage); females from different strains may be combined if socially compatible. Consider euthanatizing males if there are several of the same strain to reduce the number of singly-housed animals.

**For strains that need to be maintained by breeding:**

- It is recommended that you reduce the number of breeding cages to 2-3 cages and allow mice to continue to breed.
- Pups should be euthanized prior to weaning except in cases in which breeder cages are being replaced due to age or poor breeding.

**What is an example of maintenance activities that may be performed with animals?**

Maintaining the viability of a breeding colony that includes irreplaceable lines or strains involves actions by critical personnel. This may include establishing breeder pairs, weaning of offspring, animal identification, and genotyping. All of these can be performed by a single member of the laboratory in a relatively short amount of time, and are considered “critical maintenance activities.” These activities and personnel must be approved by the Dean or VPR.

**If personnel in my laboratory are not available to conduct animal procedures or monitoring (e.g., provision of special feed, post-operative care, tumor monitoring) can OACM provide these services?**

- OACM’s primary focus is to continue the provision of critical life support services that ensure animal welfare. This includes continuing veterinary medical care; assessment of animal health and well-being; provision of food, water, clean cages, and maintenance of appropriate environmental conditions.

- While OACM staff may be able to perform some research support services on an emergency, case-by-case basis, our commitment and priority focus must remain with critical standard care services. **Accordingly, laboratories should take the following actions:**
  - Do not bring animals to laboratories with the idea of maintaining them overnight;
  - If you have IACUC approval to house animals outside of the animal facility, ensure that OACM staff are aware of their location;
  - At the end of each day (i.e., before leaving) monitor your animals closely and euthanize those that are nearing endpoints (i.e., do not plan to euthanize them first thing the next morning); and
  - Maintain vigilant communication with your research team to ensure that each team member monitors his or her animals according to the duties and assignments outlined in your protocol.

**Can OACM continue to feed my special diet during a ramp down in research operations?**

- OACM will continue to provide special diets if appropriate arrangements have been made with OACM staff. We will continue to do our best to provide special diets for which we have ready access.

- If the diets are for clinical care (e.g., required to maintain animal welfare) OACM will continue to provide these as a priority.

**Can I still proceed with terminal studies?**
The primary focus for laboratory staff, unless a waiver has been granted to perform essential research, must be preparing for a ramp down in research operations. Our intent behind “no new experiments” is to avoid producing additional compromised animals that may require attention and care that will avert our focus from performing critical animal care services.

Can I still order supplies and medications from the OACM Business Office (e.g., isoflurane, Puralube® eye ointment, suture material)?

OACM will continue placing orders for the critical supplies needed to ensure animal health and well-being (e.g., feed, bedding, critical care veterinary supplies), but procurement of all non-critical supplies will be temporarily placed on hold unless you have approval from your Dean and VPR to continue to do research. Customers will be notified once normal purchasing operations resume.

Am I still able to take training classes through the OACM Training Core?

All in-person bio-method training classes have been cancelled until further notice.

Can COVID-19 directly infect or impact research animals and/or present an exposure risk to personnel working with them?

- While 2 dogs (Hong Kong) and 2 cats (one in Belgium and one in Hong Kong) living with people diagnosed with COVID-19 have been reported to have been infected with SARS-CoV-2, infectious disease experts and multiple international and domestic human and animal health organizations continue to agree that there is no evidence at this point to indicate that, under natural conditions, pets spread COVID-19 to people. — Source: American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)

- The USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratories has confirmed the presence of SARS-CoV-2 in one tiger at a zoo in New York. Public health employees believe the large cats became ill after being exposed to a zoo employee who was actively shedding virus. No other animals in other areas of the zoo are exhibiting similar clinical signs. The USDA and CDC are monitoring this situation. — Source: AVMA

- Out of an abundance of caution, it is recommended that those ill with COVID-19 limit contact with animals until more information is known about the virus.

- Although several new research articles have been disseminated showing that some domestic animals can be experimentally infected with SARS-CoV-2 and may transmit the virus to other animals in an experimental setting, it is important to note that:
  - Reported data is preliminary,
  - Studies include a very small number of animals in an experimental setting and, therefore,
  - Results from these studies should not be extrapolated to the potential for SARS-CoV-2 to naturally infect or be transmitted by companion animals kept as pets. — Source: AVMA