

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS) Animal Research Facility Importation of Rodents from Non-Standard Commercial Facilities and Exportation of Rodents to Other Institutions

Policy #A-003

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System
Pittsburgh, PA 15240

Service Line(s):
Research and Development (R&D)
Department

Signatory Authority:
Dr. Steven Graham, ACOS

Effective Date:
August 18, 2020

Responsible Owner:
Associate Chief of Staff/R&D

Recertification Date:
December 2021

1. PURPOSE AND AUTHORITY

a. The purpose of this policy is to:

- Describe the requirements necessary for requesting rodents from non-standard commercial facilities
- Describe the rodent pathogens which are excluded from this institution
- Describe the requirements that are necessary for exportation of rodents to another institution

b. This Policy sets forth mandatory procedures and processes to ensure compliance with VHA Directive 1200.07, Use of Animals in Research, November 23, 2011.

c. This policy applies to all VAPHS and Veterans Research Foundation employees (including those with WOC appointments) working with rodents within the VAPHS Animal Research Facility (ARF).

2. PROCEDURES

a. **Policy.**

Rodents may be imported into the VAPHS ARF provided that the procedures outlined in Section 2.b are followed. In addition, rodents may be exported to another institution provided that the procedures outlined in Section 2.c are followed. Procedures for obtaining and sending animals must be followed as per the Material Transfer Agreements (MTA) Policy #R&D-014.

b. **Import Procedures.**

(1) Shipping Application

To initiate the import process, the receiving Principal Investigator (PI) is required to submit a completed Animal Import/Export Application form to the ARF Supervisor using the ARF email address VHAPTHARF@va.gov. Rodents will only be imported if the animals are described in the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC)-approved Animal Component of Research Program (ACORP). If the animals are not described in the ACORP, the PI must submit an amendment to the IACUC, and the amendment must be approved before the animals will be imported.

(2) Health and Facility Status

The health requirements for importation of animals into the VAPHS ARF are that the sending facility¹ in its entirety must be free of all pathogens that are currently excluded from our rodent colonies for at least the previous nine months. This must be documented by no less than three negative (quarterly) sentinel health test reports in that time period. The most recent of these results should have been performed within 30 days of export. If these requirements cannot be met, then direct importation of rodents will not be allowed and alternate methods of animal procurement (e.g., embryo transfer re-derivation) will be necessary.

In addition to the required nine months of negative sentinel health reports specified above, the health status of the entire facility from where the rodents are to be exported should be provided (again through serial Quality Control sentinel health reports) for at least 18 months prior to export. Details concerning how any infectious processes that may have occurred during the period between months 10-18 should be described along with how these diseases were mitigated. If the animals in question have been relocated during this time period of 18 months, the health history should include both the current and previous housing locations. The PI is responsible for getting the reports from the facility from which the animals will be exported. The report must be sent to the ARF Supervisor and the veterinarian. The veterinarian, at his/her discretion, may choose to discuss the report at the IACUC meeting or may consult the IACUC Chair before approval for the import is granted.

(a) Excluded pathogens at this institution are as follows:

- 1) Mice: SEND (Sendai virus), PVM (Pneumonia virus of mice), MHV (Mouse hepatitis virus), MVM (Minute virus of mice), MPV (Mouse parvovirus), TMEV (Mouse polio virus), REO (Reovirus), MPUL (*Mycoplasma pulmonis*), EDIM (Epizootic Diarrhea of Infant Mice), LCMV (Lymphocytic Choriomeningitis Virus), MAV (Mouse adenovirus FL/K87), ECTRO (Ectromelia virus), K (Mouse pneumonitis virus), POLY (Polyoma virus), MTLV (Mouse Thymic virus), MCMV (Mouse

¹ A facility is loosely defined as a collective set of rooms, corridors or floors integral to a specific building that house animals. The term is subject to considerable professional judgment that may either expand or restrict this definition, factoring in matters such as the shared use of cage wash systems, procedural space and animal husbandry personnel as well as general trafficking patterns and other criteria.

cytomegalovirus), HANT (Hantaan virus), ECUN (*Encephalitozoon cuniculi*), CARB (Cilia-associated respiratory bacillus), pinworms of the Genera *Aspiculuris* and *Syphacia*, and ectoparasites.

- 2) Helicobacter infection is not necessarily an exclusionary factor for importation (depending on the nature of the research study in question and direct concerns of the PI doing the importing), however, the Helicobacter status of the animals in question must be determined and reported prior to the shipment. In addition, mice that test positive for murine norovirus (MNV) are not excluded from importation. The status of these animals must also be determined and reported prior to shipment.
- 3) Rats: SEND, PVM, RCV/SDAV (Rat coronavirus/Sialodacryoadenitis), RV (Kilham rat virus), H-1 (Toolan's H-1 virus), TMEV, REO, MPUL, LCMV, HANT, MAV, ECUN, CARB, RPV (Rat parvovirus), REV (Rat Enterovirus), pinworms of the Genera *Aspiculuris* and *Syphacia*, and ectoparasites.

(b) Animal Identification

All animals must have a means of permanent identification, such as: ear tag, ear notch, toe clip, tattoo, or microchip. An ID code must be included with the shipment.

(c) Strain

The strain name must be given in its entirety (for example, C57BL/6-Tg (ACTbEGFP) 10sb/J should not be abbreviated to C57BL) to prevent identification errors.

(d) Breeding Pairs and Male Rodents

Males and females sent as breeding pairs must be shipped in separate shipping boxes or shipping box compartments to prevent breeding in transit. Except for litter mates, males should be shipped separately to prevent fighting during shipment.

(e) PI Preparedness

The PI must have the appropriate supplies, drugs, controlled substances and all other items that will be administered to the animals prior to the import.

c. **Export Procedures.**

Rodents owned by the VAPHS can only be shipped to another institution that has assurance of an appropriate animal care and use program. The VAPHS IACUC will determine the suitability of the recipient institution.

(1) PI's Responsibilities

(a) VAPHS PIs must ensure that the option of transfer of animals to another institution is included in their VAPHS IACUC-approved protocol.

(b) An Animal Import/Export Application must be filled out.

(c) The Application must be sent to the ARF Supervisor for notification that a request has been made to send rodents from the VAPHS ARF to another institution.

(d) The VAPHS PI must request proof of the IACUC approval at the receiving facility, as well as any other pertinent information (i.e., PHS assurance) as requested by the veterinarians or the IACUC/designee.

(2) Receiving Institution's Responsibilities

(a) The receiving institution must send proof of the IACUC approval letter for the protocol that will maintain the transferred rodents.

(3) International Exportation

(a) The receiving institution must send proof of the IACUC approval letter for the protocol that will maintain the transferred rodents.

Upon receipt of the Animal Import/Export Application and an active protocol approval letter, the ARF Supervisor will forward the request to the IACUC or designee (veterinarian). The IACUC or designee will review the request and determine if the rodents may be exported.

The VAPHS IACUC will decide, on a case-by-case basis, if shipment can be approved based upon proof of adequate animal care and protocol oversight. Such proof may include a description of the research paradigm for the rodents being exported, a letter of protocol approval, a description of the animal care and use program (including type of rodent housing and surveillance program for rodent pathogens), and evidence of program oversight by qualified personnel.

3. ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

a. Principal Investigator (PI) – The PI is required to submit a completed Animal Import/Export Application form to the ARF Supervisor for either an import or export request. They must also submit an MTA, if applicable.

b. IACUC Designee/Veterinarian – The IACUC Designee/Veterinarian must review submitted Import/Export Applications and determine if the import/export is approved. The IACUC Chair may be consulted to assist in making the final determination for approval.

4. DEFINITIONS

None.

5. REFERENCES

VHA Handbook 1200.07, Use of Animals in Research, November 23, 2011.

6. REVIEW

This policy is reviewed at recertification, when there are changes to the governing document (for example, national policy or an accreditation body mandate), and any regulatory requirement for more frequent review.

7. RECERTIFICATION

This Policy is scheduled for recertification fifteen (15) months from the Effective Date. In the event of contradiction with national policy, the national policy supersedes and controls.

8. SIGNATORY AUTHORITY

//signed copy on file //

Gretchen Haas, MD
Chair, Research and Development Committee
Date Approved: August 18, 2020

//signed copy on file //

Steven Graham, MD, PhD
Associate Chief of Staff Research and Development Department
Date Approved: August 18, 2020

NOTE: *The signature remains valid until rescinded by an appropriate administrative action.*

DISTRIBUTION: SOPs are available at: <https://www.va.gov/pittsburgh-health-care/research/safety-security/animal-research/>