

Visitors in the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System Animal Research Facility

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System
Pittsburgh, PA 15240

Signatory Authority: Dr.
Steven Graham, ACOS

Responsible Owner:
Associate Chief of Staff/R&D

Policy #A-007

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

Effective Date:
March 17, 2020

Recertification Date:
December 2021

1. PURPOSE AND AUTHORITY

- a. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that collaborators, visitors and observers at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS) who may come in contact with laboratory animals or their products are informed of the risks associated with visiting the Animal Research Facility (ARF) or observing procedures. This policy also provides guidance for the conduct of collaborators, visitors or observers to assure the VAPHS's commitment to the ethical treatment of laboratory animals. VAPHS must be assured that observation of any aspect of animal use will in no way bring harm to the animals, and that collaborators, visitors and observers are aware that potential hazards with observing animals' procedures or visiting any animal facilities exist. The VAPHS advocates a high-quality animal care program and by doing so, assure the public, researchers and employees that there is a true commitment by collaborators, visitors and observers to assure the well-being of the animal facility and the animals housed therein.
- b. This SOP 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 visitors that enter the VAPHS ARF.

2. PROCEDURES

a. Policy.

Everyone that enters the ARF must follow facility rules regarding gowning and donning personal protective equipment (PPE).

When visitors enter the ARF, they must sign in the Visitor logbook.

b. Visitor Requirements.

(1) Visitors may be permitted in the ARF if approved, in advance, by the VAPHS Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS/R&D) or the Deputy ACOS/R&D. The visitor will be approved to enter the ARF provided that the ARF Supervisor or an ARF staff

member is present to review the visitation criteria, such as health issues related to animal exposure. The visitor must always be accompanied by the Authorized Guide.

(2) To begin the approval process, the Authorized Guide must notify the ARF Supervisor or an ARF staff member that they will be sponsoring a visitor. The Authorized Guide must provide the visitor's name, the reason for the visit, the rooms to be visited, the estimated length of the visit, and the visitor's Health and Risk Assessment (see Appendix) by email or in writing at **least 24 hours in advance** of the visit. The ARF Supervisor or ARF staff member will forward the request to the ACOS/R&D or Deputy ACOS/R&D for approval. The ACOS/R&D or Deputy ACOS/R&D will inform the Authorized Guide as well as the ARF Supervisor if the visitor is approved to enter the ARF.

(3) The Authorized Guide must instruct visitors who may have been in another animal facility within the last 24 hours that they must have showered and wear a completely different change of clothes, including shoes. Please refer to the VAPHS Animal Biosecurity Policy #A-005.

(4) If visitors wish to enter rooms where animals are housed, the Authorized Guide must make this request at least 2 weeks in advance so that the IACUC Chair or designee can also review the request. However, visitors will not be allowed to have physical contact with the animals and their housing.

(5) Visitors must immediately report to the VA Police Services upon entry onto the VAPHS University Drive campus. Visitors will be issued a visitor badge when they sign into the facility. The Authorized Guide can then escort the visitor to the ARF.

(6) Visitors must always be under the direct supervision of the Authorized Guide during a tour or visit of the ARF.

(7) Visitors can only enter the ARF during normal business hours (8:00 am until 4:00 pm) or when ARF staff are present.

(8) Visitors shall not be permitted to take still photographs or videos of the ARF unless prior approval has been granted by the VAPHS IACUC and VAPHS ACOS/R&D. This includes the use of cell phones for these purposes.

(9) The Authorized Guide must ensure that all policy requirements are met during the visit or the visitor will be asked to leave the ARF immediately.

c. Risk Assessment.

It is the responsibility of the ARF Supervisor and/or Authorized Guide to inform the visitor that the ARF may pose health risks to individuals who have allergies to animals, animal dander or those who are immunocompromised. Such persons

should be advised to avoid or limit exposure. If there are any questions regarding a risk to the visitor's health, the visit must not occur until such time as the visitor is clearly informed of the risks involved. It is also the responsibility of the ARF Supervisor and/or Authorized Guide to discuss with the visitor the risks he or she may pose to the research animals. Persons who have respiratory illnesses including but not limited to, active tuberculosis or influenza, are not permitted to visit the ARF. All visitors will be offered participation in the VAPHS Animal exposure Preventive Medicine Program (AEPMP). The need for Occupational Health to perform a risk assessment for visitors will depend on the level of risk to the visitor, to the experimental animals, and to the research. The ARF Supervisor will determine level of risk depending on whether a visitor intends to enter the ARF or procedure rooms when animals are in residence or if they plan to only enter hallways and business areas. All visitors must review and sign the attached Health and Risk Assessment (first time only). A copy of the AEPMP policy and the location of Occupational Health Services will be provided for those that are interested in enrolling in the program. If enrollment in the AEPMP is initially declined, a visitor may change their mind and participate in the AEPMP program at any time.

3. ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

- a. The ARF Supervisor and Authorized Guide are responsible for implementing and enforcing this policy.
- b. The ACOS/R&D and/or Deputy ACOS/R&D must review requests for an Authorized Guide to bring a visitor into the ARF.
- c. The Authorized Guide is responsible to supervise a visitor that enters the ARF.
- d. The ARF Supervisor and/or the Authorized Guide must ensure that the visitor is aware of the risks associated with entering the ARF.

4. DEFINITIONS

- a. **Authorized Guide:** Person requesting visitor approval and is responsible for the visitor during his/her time in the ARF. This person could be a member of the ARF staff, or a designated Research staff member listed on an approved IACUC protocol.
- b. **Visitor:** This includes anyone not otherwise authorized to enter the ARF to observe animal research or have direct contact with laboratory animals as part of their specific academic position or job responsibilities at the VAPHS or by law or regulation. For the purpose of this policy, a visitor could be a non-VAPHS employee who has specific scientific or educational purpose to enter the ARF to observe an animal procedure or participate in aspects of experiments that do not include animal handling or animal procedures. A visitor could be a VAPHS employee, fellow, or student not included as an authorized and trained personnel on an approved IACUC protocol. Use of visitor status under this policy for such employees, fellows or

students is intended for no more than five (5) visits per year. Justification is required by the Authorized Guide for VAPHS employees, fellows, and students requesting more than five (5) visits to the ARF.

Visitors do NOT include:

- Employees, fellows and students of the VAPHS or the University of Pittsburgh authorized to participate in one or more VAPHS approved IACUC protocols.
- A non-VAPHS consultant specifically evaluated and authorized by the IACUC to perform hands-on technical research support services (for example, induction or maintenance and recovery from general anesthesia) on animals housed in the facility.
- An outside vendor or a VAPHS employee not otherwise approved on a specific approved IACUC protocol but authorized by the facility for the purpose of facility maintenance or inspection (i.e., Facilities Management Service-FMS).

c. **Animal Facility:** Any VAPHS managed area that houses experimental animals of any species. Animal facilities may include animal housing areas, procedure areas, behavioral rooms, storage rooms, office space and hallways.

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: March 17, 2020

March 17, 2020

S-007 Visitor Policy for ARF

//SIGNED COPY ON FILE //

Steven Graham, MD, PhD
Associate Chief of Staff Research and Development Department
Date Approved: March 17, 2020

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

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

APPENDIX: VAPHS ARF Health and Risk Assessment

*Each visitor that will access the VAPHS ARF must complete this health and risk assessment document.

1. Clinical Condition:

Should an Occupational Healthcare Professional be made aware of any pre-existing or existing health conditions?

No. Proceed to Item #2

Yes. An Occupational Healthcare Professional should be contacted to discuss any pre-existing or existing health conditions.

2. Things to Know:

- The most common health hazard in animal facilities is allergies.
- If the visit requires entry into an animal room, you must first contact the ARF Supervisor.
- The ARF Supervisor will advise you of any risk associated with the room and provide you with the proper personal protective equipment and procedures to enter the room.

3. Certification:

- I understand the most common health hazard in animal facilities is allergies and I will contact the ARF Supervisor before entering any room in the VAPHS ARF.
- I understand that an Occupational Healthcare Professional is available to discuss any health conditions that may affect me.
- I assure that this assessment is complete and accurate.

Name (Print):
Institution:
Department:
Phone:

March 17, 2020

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Signature: _____

Date: _____