



OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PROGRAM

**FOR RESEARCH PERSONNEL EXPOSED TO
ANIMALS OR ANIMAL PRODUCTS**

Office of Research Compliance & Integrity

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(Revised)

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PROGRAM
For Research Personnel Exposed to Animals or Animal Products
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OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PROGRAM FOR RESEARCH PERSONNEL EXPOSED TO ANIMALS OR ANIMAL PRODUCTS

Purpose

The Occupational Health Program (OHP) covers individuals with potential exposure and contact with animals, body fluids, tissues, wastes, contaminated living quarters, or using infectious agents in animals. The OHP manual has been developed in accordance with the *Occupational Health and Safety in the Care and Use of Research Animals* document prepared by the National Research Council (NRC), the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals 8th edition* (Institute of Laboratory Animal Resources [ILAR]), the *Biosafety in Microbiological and Biomedical Laboratories*, CDC•NIH, and the *Biosafety Manual and Exposure Control Plan* (University of South Alabama). This document reflects current information and services for those persons at risk. In addition, the OHP is described in Section E of the USA Animal Welfare Assurance.

There are times when research involves the deliberate infection of animals with biological materials capable of causing adverse effects to human health. Therefore, biohazardous research must be registered and approved for use at specific biosafety levels and by the Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC).

Chemical hazards (includes chemotherapeutic compounds) used in animal research are overseen by the Office of Safety and Environmental Compliance (SEC). The Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) requires an acknowledgment letter from SEC stating that the Investigator has included the compound on their "chemical inventory" list. The letter provides the IACUC to ensure that the Investigator is aware of the chemical hazard safe handling and disposal requirements.

Nothing in this document intends to be **contrary** to the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) provisions or the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Accommodations are in accordance with these acts and with the guidance of the Human Resources department. However, due to the nature of animal care and use activities, such accommodations may be difficult to achieve and still ensure the person's safety.

The USA Office of Research Compliance and Integrity administers the OHP in cooperation with the Attending Veterinarian (AV) and USA Health Industrial Medicine health provider. The USA Health Industrial Medicine provides input and oversight of medical assessments for the OHP. The Office of Research Compliance's IACUC/IBC Administrator is responsible for monitoring and documenting OHP enrollment. Personnel included in the OHP program are animal care and support staff (including maintenance personnel), IACUC investigators and protocol associates, committee members, and visitors as applicable.

OHP enrollment is of no cost to the employee. OHP charges are billed to the applicable College/Department. The IACUC Administrator can provide a fee schedule upon request.

The purpose and intent of the OHP are to help provide a safe and healthy work environment. Occupational exposure to laboratory animals, body fluids, tissues, wastes, chemical hazards, or biohazardous materials may present potential problems. Therefore, the OHP is an essential component for developing and sustaining a helpful program.

Eligibility and Identification of Participants- Risk Assessment

Class Categories

The Occupational Health Program (OHP) for personnel who work with animals in laboratory research facilities is risk-based and uses a tiered, categorical system to assess occupational exposure and risk. This system is designed to identify potential hazards, determine appropriate medical surveillance, and support safe participation in research activities.

Risk assessment is based on an evaluation of the following factors:

- Animal contact
- Exposure intensity
- Exposure frequency
- Physical and biological hazards presented by the animal
- Hazardous properties of agents used in research protocols
- Individual susceptibility
- Occupational health history
- Available hazard-control measures

Based on this assessment, participants are assigned to one of the following categories:

<i>Category</i>	<i>Risk Indicator</i>
A	Rodents, Rabbits, Swine and Birds
B	Dogs, Cats, Ruminants
C	BSL-3(Biologicals)/ABSL-3(Infected animals)/BRL Employees
D	Maintenance and Support Personnel/Non-affiliated IACUC members
E	Fish, Amphibians & Reptiles

Inclusion in the Program

All University of South Alabama personnel directly involved in research animal activities or who plan to be involved may participate in the OHP. Occupational exposures include employees who feed and handle animals, clean animal cages, and are exposed to unfixed animal tissues, animal wastes, and/or bodily fluids. These individuals generally include:

- Veterinary staff at the Biological Resources Laboratory (BRL)
- Animal caretakers and technicians
- Animal facility managers
- Principal Investigators on animal protocols
- Graduate students, undergraduate students, post-doctoral fellows, visiting scientific personnel, and other laboratory personnel listed on IACUC protocols.
- Unaffiliated (IACUC members)

Enrollment in OHP

Enrollment in the OHP takes place before a participant begins working with animals. New employees who will handle animals, their tissues, body fluids or wastes, **must** complete the **Occupational Initial Health Screening** form through **REDCap**. An [OHP User Guide](#) has been developed to assist with accessing and submitting the required questionnaires and is available on the [Occupational Health Enrollment webpage](#).

The USA Health Industrial Medicine reviews completed health screening questionnaires to assess occupational exposure risks, including direct and indirect contact with research animals. The health questionnaire provides medical history information, including:

- General history
- Occupational exposures
- Biological hazards
- Immunization history
- Allergies

As part of this evaluation, the healthcare provider may conduct a physical examination, order diagnostic tests such as titers, and recommend appropriate preventative measures, including immunizations. All participants are offered a tetanus vaccination.

Based on the assessment findings, participants are assigned to appropriate class categories that reflect required preventative care and medical surveillance. The healthcare provider contributes to the determination of medical clearance for work involving research animals using information obtained from the health screening questionnaire and professional expertise in occupational health. When additional assessment is necessary, participants may be contacted to schedule an in-office consultation.

Medical evaluations and clearance recommendations support designated animal occupational activities but do not determine eligibility for laboratory employment. Final medical clearance decisions are based on individual health history, occupational risk, and applicable institutional policies.

OHP health screening status is communicated by email to the IACUC office, the employee, and the laboratory supervisor. Participant enrollment dates are documented in the REDCap database as part of the employee's electronic record.

Medical Exclusion

The healthcare provider, at their discretion, may review a participant's medical history and provide a recommendation advising against an employee's ability to work in a laboratory with animals. This determination is based on the risk assessment and health status of the OHP participant. Risk assessment and medical exclusion are determined by a medical professional in conjunction with the laboratory supervisor, not by the IACUC or the Office of Research Compliance and Integrity.

All reasonable efforts will be made to resolve short-term medical conditions (e.g., pregnancy) through temporary reassignments to other duties, increased the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), including respiratory protection, or medical leave of absence, if available. In cases involving permanent or long-term medical conditions may happen (e.g., immunosuppression due to long-term chemotherapy, chronic illness, or severe allergies to animals), every effort will be made to accommodate the participant through non-hazardous duties or the use of specific PPE. However, additional steps (including disability retirement or dismissal) may be necessary to protect the employee.

Electing Non-participation in the Occupational Health Program

Participants may decline participation in OHP by signing a waiver documenting their refusal. The waiver request is completed through **REDCap**. Refusal to participate in the OHP may be grounds for disapproval of authorization to work with animals and potentially infectious materials. This request is submitted to the Attending Veterinarian (AV) for review and approval. Approval is rarely granted and only when risk is negligible. The AV does not access the participants health status.

Continuing Health Assessments

Annual Review

Employees assigned to the BSL-3/ABSL-3 facility, as well as BRL personnel responsible for managing biological agents and/or working with animals, must update their health status annually. Maintenance personnel who enter active research areas are also required to undergo yearly assessments. Procedures for completing the Continuing Health Assessments follow the guidelines outlined in Components of the OHP for Class C Participants of this manual.

Triennial Review

Personnel exclusively engaged in animal research, without involvement in BSL-3/ABSL-3 activities, must update their health status every three years after initial enrollment. They will receive an email notification from the REDCap prompting them to complete the OHP Triennial Review form. The USA Health Industrial Medicine provider may review the triennial form and provide a recommendation regarding an employee's ability to return to laboratory work; involving the use of animals; however, the provider does not issue final approval or denial.

Not all triennial reviews are routed to the healthcare provider's office. If a participant's medical history has remained unchanged since the initial review, a clearance email is sent to the employee, their supervisor, and the IACUC office.

Health Status Update Form *(for medical changes between review periods)*

If an employee experiences a medical change before completing an annual or triennial review period, the health provider will review the situation on a case-by-case basis. Reasonable adjustments, documentation updates, or an interim review may be implemented as appropriate.

Records and Files

USA Health Industrial Medicine will oversee medical records for occupational health program participants. Copies are available to participants and their primary healthcare providers upon request. Employee information in the **REDCap** system is protected from unauthorized or indiscriminate use of personal health information (PHI). Participants PHI is not shared or maintained by the IACUC office.

Work-Related Injuries and Illnesses

Evaluation of work-related injuries and illnesses

Any injury or potential exposure sustained while working with or around animals must receive immediate first aid and be reported to the supervisor on duty. Employees may be referred to USA Health Industrial Medicine, University Hospital (after hours), or the nearest emergency room for life-threatening conditions. USA Health Industrial Medicine or the attending emergency physician will coordinate any necessary specialty referrals (e.g., exposure to infectious agents used in animals will be referred to the Infectious Disease Clinic). If human biohazardous materials are involved, personnel must comply with the OSHA Bloodborne Pathogen Standard. Medical consultation requirements.

Reporting Injuries

Regardless of the species, the employee is required to submit an incident report through the University Incident Reporting system within 72 hours of exposure. If the employee is unable to submit the report, a supervisor may do so on their behalf.

Components of OHP Risk Indicators

Components of the OHP for Class A Participants

Class A participants anticipate handling only rodents, birds, rabbits, swine, and/or their tissues, body fluids, or wastes.

1. **Occupational Health Screening Questionnaire**

Upon enrollment in the OHP, participants are required to complete an Occupational Initial Health Screening Questionnaire. In addition, the healthcare provider may require a physical examination and/or titers or diagnostic tests, as appropriate.

2. **Tetanus Immunization**

According to the Public Health Service Immunization Practices Advisory Committee (IPAC) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), tetanus immunization must be kept up to date. Booster doses are administered every ten (10) years or as needed under the following circumstances:

- ~ following the report of an injury
- ~ as needed

3. **Hepatitis-B Vaccination Program**

The OHP offers a voluntary Hepatitis-B vaccination program for all personnel who handle animals. The Hepatitis-B vaccination series consists of two to three (2-3) injections administered over a six month period. Vaccinations are provided in accordance with established Hepatitis-B vaccine protocols by USA Health Industrial Medicine.

4. **Field Research**

Individuals engaged in field studies or observational studies approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) fall within this classification. Field research plays a crucial role in both teaching and research at the University of South Alabama. Given these activities are often conducted off-campus, participants must provide supplementary information to the healthcare provider during the initial enrollment process.

COVID-19 and Influenza Vaccinations

While COVID-19 and Influenza vaccines are not offered through the OHP, these by the vaccinations are strongly encouraged by the University and are covered through the employee's health insurance.

Components of the OHP for Class B Participants

Class B participants anticipate handling dogs, cats, or ruminants and/or their tissues, body fluids, or wastes.

Currently, USA does not house or use dogs, cats, or ruminants.

Components of the OHP for Class C Participants

Class C participants anticipate working with BSL-3 Agents or ABSL-3 Animals infected agents.

Personnel working with BSL-3 biological materials, ABSL-3 animals, or in the BRL are required, upon enrollment in the OHP, to complete an in-office medical visit and serum collection. Class C participants must also update their health status annually, as described in the Continuing Health Assessments section of this manual.

Components of the OHP for Class D Participants

Class D participants do not work directly with animals but may have exposure during their regular duties.

Maintenance workers and other support staff, including non-affiliated IACUC members, must complete the occupational health questionnaire for review by a healthcare provider. Participation is assessed on a case-by-case basis. If a potential hazard exists, the employee will be scheduled for an in-office medical evaluation.

Components of the OHP for Class E Participants

Class E participants anticipate handling fish, amphibians, or reptiles.

Class E participants have the same OHP requirements as Class A participants (see page 9).

References

Additional documents and publications:

1. [*Occupational Health and Safety in the Care and Use of Research Animals*](#)
National Academy Press, 1997
2. [*Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, 8th edition*](#)
National Academy Press, Washington, D.C.
3. [*Biosafety in Microbiological and Biomedical Laboratories*](#)
CDC•NIH, 6th Edition
4. [*Biosafety Manual and the Exposure Control Plan*](#) University of South Alabama

SUMMARY OF OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PROGRAM

TABLE 1

<u>Class</u>	<u>Health Screening Questionnaire</u>	<u>Physical Exam</u> ¹	<u>Hepatitis B Immunization</u>	<u>T.B. Skin test (PPD)</u>	<u>Chest X-Ray (T.B. Reactors)</u>	<u>Tetanus</u>	<u>Serum Storage</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Medical Health Update</u>
A Rodents, Swine, & Rabbits	Initial Employment		Optional			@ 10 years	N/A		Triennial
B Dogs, Cats, & Ruminants	Initial Employment		Optional			@ 10 years	As necessary ⁶	Q-Fever titer ² Toxoplasmosis counseling ³	Triennial
C BSL-3/ABSL-3/BRL workers	Initial Employment (In-office visit is REQUIRED) ⁷		Optional				Initial Employment		Annual
D No direct animal contact (maintenance)	As warranted ⁵	As Required	Optional	As Re-quired	As Required	N/A	N/A		N/A
E Fish, Amphibians & Reptiles	Initial Employment	As warranted ⁵	Optional			@ 10 years	N/A		Triennial

1. Includes medical history, examination of pertinent body systems. Additional tests are performed if indicated.
2. If working with livestock (sheep, goats, or cattle) or their waste products.
3. For women (up to age 45) working with cats or their waste products.
4. The healthcare provider determines the level of risk.
5. Titers will be checked as necessary for class B.
6. **BSL-3/ABSL-3/BRL** employees are required to not only complete the Initial Enrollment Health questionnaire but are also required to be seen by the health care provider.

SUMMARY OF REVISIONS

Summary of Revisions and Tracked Changes

All revisions documented in this appendix are effective as of the **February 2026** revision date and supersede corresponding content in the **April 2024** manual.

Superseded Version: April 2024

Current Version: February 2026 (Revised)

Administrative and Governance Revisions

<u>Section / Area</u>	<u>Description of Change</u>	<u>Change Type</u>	<u>Final Page #(s)</u>
Administrative Oversight	Updated office name to Office of Research Compliance and Integrity.	Administrative	Page 3
Medical Clearance Authority	Clarified that healthcare providers issue recommendations and do not determine employment eligibility.	Clarification	Pages 5, 6, & 7

Document Organization and Structure

<u>Section / Area</u>	<u>Description of Change</u>	<u>Change Type</u>	<u>Final Page #(s)</u>
Table of Contents	Updated to reflect revised section titles and added content.	Editorial	Page 2
Revisions Section	Added a formal Summary of Revisions section.	Substantive	Page 2

Risk Assessment and Participant Classification

<u>Section / Area</u>	<u>Description of Change</u>	<u>Change Type</u>	<u>Final Page # (s)</u>
Risk Assessment Methodology	Expanded and reformatted occupational risk assessment framework.	Clarification	Page 4
Class C Class D Definition	Removed Is now Class C and has expanded to include BSL-3, ABSL-3, and BRL personnel.	Substantive Substantive	Page 4 & 10 Pages 4 & 10
Class F	Is now Class E	Substantive	Pages 4 & 10

Enrollment and Health Screening Procedures

<u>Section / Area</u>	<u>Description of Change</u>	<u>Change Type</u>	<u>Final Page #(s)</u>
Enrollment Process	Clarified use of RED-Cap and availability of OHP User Guide.	Procedural	Page 5
Clearance Communication	Updated notification process to include employee, supervisor, and IACUC office.	Procedural	Page 6

Continuing Health Assessments

<u>Section / Area</u>	<u>Description of Change</u>	<u>Change Type</u>	<u>Final Page #(s)</u>
Section Title	Renamed Triennial Review to Continuing Health Assessments.	Editorial	Page 6
Annual Review Scope	Clarified applicability to BSL-3/ABSL-3 and BRL staff.	Clarification	Page 6
Triennial Review Process	Clarified provider review not required when no changes reported.	Procedural	Page 6
Health Status Update Form	Added interim medical change reporting mechanism.	Substantive	Page 6

Medical Exclusion and Accommodation

<u>Section / Area</u>	<u>Description of Change</u>	<u>Change Type</u>	<u>Final Page #(s)</u>
Medical Exclusion Authority	Added coordination with laboratory supervisors.	Clarification	Page 7
Accommodation Language	Refined short-term and long-term condition guidance.	Editorial	Page 7
Medical Exclusion/Non-Participation	Moved to Enrollment in OHP section	Editorial	Page 7

Work-Related Injury and Incident Reporting

<u>Section / Area</u>	<u>Description of Change</u>	<u>Change Type</u>	<u>Final Page #(s)</u>
Incident Reporting Timeline	Established 72-hour reporting requirement.	Substantive	Page 7

Vaccination and Preventive Care

<u>Section / Area</u>	<u>Description of Change</u>	<u>Change Type</u>	<u>Final Page #(s)</u>
COVID-19 and Influenza	Expanded guidance on vaccination encouragement and insurance coverage.	Clarification	Page 8
Hepatitis-B Program	Minor wording clarification of vaccination schedule.	Editorial	Page 8

Appendix and Summary Table Updates

<u>Section / Area</u>	<u>Description of Change</u>	<u>Change Type</u>	<u>Final Page #(s)</u>
Appendix 1 – Table 1	Clarified BRL inclusion and standardized terminology.	Editorial	Page 12
Appendix 1 – Table 1	Removed Class C and Footnote #4	Editorial	Page 12
