TULANE UNIVERSITY
ANIMAL HANDLER HEALTH SURVEILLANCE PROGRAM

Program Information

The Animal Handler Health Surveillance (AHHS) Program is designed to protect Tulane personnel (including employees and students) from occupational exposure to conditions that may result in animal-related illnesses. Illnesses include, but are not limited to, allergic reactions, rabies, Hepatitis B, and tuberculosis. Please refer to the brochure entitled “Health and Safety in Animal Research” for information on the risks and hazards of animal research.

As part of the AHHS program, any personnel who will have contact with or exposure to animals or animal tissues in conjunction with teaching or research must complete a Risk Assessment and History Form (RAHF) and/or a Declination Form. This includes Facilities Services and other Tulane personnel who may enter animal care areas to perform maintenance and/or service work. Full participation in the AHHS program by visitors is optional; however, as a minimum, visitors must complete a Declination Form. There is no charge for the completion of the RAHF or Declination Form.

The RAHF is reviewed and follow-up is initiated (as necessary) with the individual based upon medical history noted in the completed form, the type of animal contact, screening, and immunizations required by the program. If a question in the History section of the RAHF is answered YES and if the condition is related to animal handling or if work involves animals or tissues experimentally infected with human pathogens, then additional follow-up may be needed.

All Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) protocols are reviewed to ensure that all personnel with animal contact participate in the AHHS program. All Tulane personnel listed on an IACUC-reviewed protocol are provided information on the AHHS program by the Office of Environmental Health and Safety (OEHS).

Principal investigators are responsible for ensuring that all personnel involved with their IACUC-reviewed project are given AHHS program information. Principal investigators and their personnel who do not respond to written requests from OEHS to participate in the AHHS Program may not be allowed to enter or work with animals in animal housing facilities.

AHHS Program Elements

I. Risk Assessment and History Form (RAHF)

The RAHF is required to be filled out by Tulane personnel who will have contact with animals or animal tissues in conjunction with teaching or research at Tulane University. Completion of the RAHF by visitors is optional; as a minimum, visitors must complete a Declination Form. The completed RAHF will be reviewed by OEHS in the case of the Tulane University Health Sciences Center (TUHSC) and Uptown campuses and by the Occupational Health Nurse in the case of the Tulane National Primate Research Center (TNPRC) to determine whether additional information, follow-up, and/or interaction are necessary.
The original form must be delivered to the appropriate representatives at the TUHSC, Uptown Campus, and TNPRC as indicated on the bottom of the last page of the form and ultimately to the OEHS for further processing and data entry. All original forms will be placed in a fire resistant file cabinet at OEHS for access only by a designated OEHS staff member.

Important information required on the form includes the animal classification (based on species), frequency of animal contact, and an explanation of how animal contact or exposure will occur. It is critical that the individual provides accurate information on the RAHF which may also be used by a licensed healthcare provider if further medical evaluation is warranted.

NOTE: If the individual refuses to complete a RAHF, a “Declination of Medical Examination” form must be completed.

II. Immunizations and Screening

- Tetanus immunization is highly recommended for all individuals with animal contact. A booster shot is needed if it has been 10 or more years since the previous tetanus immunization.

- The Hepatitis B vaccination is required to be offered to individuals who work with animals/animal tissues that are known to be genetically altered with human or non-human primate genes or tissues that are known to carry the hepatitis B virus (HBV). Refusal to accept the vaccine must be provided in writing.

- Semi-annual tuberculosis (TB) screening is required for individuals who handle non-human primates (Class C) or those who are working with animals or tissue infected with Mycobacterium species.

- Rabies immunization is recommended for individuals who handle with dogs, cats, or ferrets. (Class B) A titer will be required if previously vaccinated.

Other immunizations and screenings may be necessary based on the species of animal and type of work. Costs for any required medical examinations, including tests, screening and immunizations are the responsibility of the individual’s budgetary unit.

It is recommended that all personnel review their allergy status on an annual basis with a physician or other licensed healthcare provider.

III. Medical Evaluation

If any question in the History section of the RAHF is answered YES and if the condition is related to animal handling, or if work involves animals or tissues experimentally infected with human pathogens, or if the person has additional health concerns (related to animal handling) to discuss with a licensed healthcare provider, then one of the following actions must be initiated:

A. The person may schedule an appointment with a Tulane or other OEHS-approved occupational health clinic. The cost of this medical examination and any subsequent follow-up will be the responsibility of the individual’s budgetary unit. OR
B. The person may schedule an appointment to see their own licensed healthcare provider for medical examination and/or follow up. The cost of this medical examination will be the responsibility of the person involved.

C. Students who are not employees may coordinate medical examination with the Student Health Center. The cost of the exam, immunizations, and screenings are the student’s responsibility if not covered by the student’s health insurer.

D. Complete a “Declination for Medical Examination” (“Declination”) form and forward the original to the appropriate representatives at the TUHSC, Uptown Campus, and TNPRC.

If follow-up includes medical evaluation by an occupational health clinic or the individual’s physician, then a written report must be completed and signed by the licensed healthcare provider. The written report must indicate whether or not the individual is medically qualified to work with the specified animals; it must also include the dates of any immunizations and/or screenings specifically required by the AHHS program. These documents will be kept by OEHS (or TNPRC Occupational Health) in confidence in the same manner as the submitted Risk Assessment and History Forms.

IV. **Recordkeeping**

An electronic record will be developed and maintained by OEHS of all individuals who have completed and submitted the RAHFs. Completed RAHFs and related medical documentation will be kept in a confidential manner and in accordance with Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations.

V. **Program Compliance**

Personnel who fail to comply with the AHHS Program may not be allowed to enter or work with animals in teaching or research at any Tulane campus. If a principal investigator or other person wishes to contest the decision for failure to comply, they may submit a request in writing to the AHHS Workgroup. Contact OEHS at 988-5496 or via email at OEHSRAHF@tulane.edu.

VI. **Animal Handler Health Surveillance Workgroup**

An Animal Handler Health Surveillance Workgroup has been established which includes representatives from the OEHS, the Department Comparative Medicine (DCM), the Biosafety Office and TNPRC Occupational Health.

The Workgroup will meet at least every six months and is responsible for the following:
- Development, revision, and approval of policies and procedures associated with the AHHS program;
- Ensuring that the list of approved personnel (e.g., those who completed RAHFs) is sent to DCM and TNPRC Occupational Health on a monthly basis;
- Ensuring that principal investigators and personnel are participating in the program as prescribed;
- Reviewing issues involving the AHHS program and developing recommendations;
- Presenting issues and recommended action to Senior Administration and
- Annual evaluation of the AHHS program.
VII. References

- *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*, National Research Council
- *Occupational Health and Safety in the Care and Use of Research Animals*, National Research Council

*Reviewed & Approved by Office of General Counsel January 2009; Revised December 2010*