

Occupational Health Program

HealthPoint Occupational Health Program (OHP)

The *HealthPoint* Occupational Health Program (OHP) at The University of Texas at Austin partners with the employee, Environmental Health & Safety (EHS), and Principal Investigators (PI) to ensure that precautions are taken to protect the university's most valuable asset — you.

The goal of the OHP is to prevent occupational injury and illness by avoiding, controlling, or eliminating hazards in the workplace. While the emphasis of the program is the prevention of illness and injury; it also includes provisions for early diagnosis and treatment when necessary.

All individuals who work with animals on an IACUC protocol must enroll in the OHP prior to beginning animal work. This includes faculty, staff, postdoctoral associates, student workers and volunteers. It may also include personnel from Facilities Services and Building Services who are assigned to support the Animal Resource Center (ARC) or other animal housing areas.

To enroll in the OHP, participants must complete and submit the *Health Assessment Questionnaire for Personnel Working with Research Animals*

The health assessment questionnaire includes personal health information that will assist OHP staff in providing individualized counseling on occupational health risks, and methods to minimize exposures in the workplace, if needed. If the OHP determines that follow up screening is necessary, an appointment will be scheduled with *HealthPoint* Occupational Health Program.

Upon submission of the initial questionnaire, your UT Learn record will include one of the following entries:

- AN0020 – *HealthPoint* OHP Low Risk – (fish, rodents, amphibians, birds, mammals)
- AN0023 – *HealthPoint* OHP High Risk – (non-human primates, bats, wild-caught rodents)

To renew enrollment in the OHP, participants must submit an abbreviated version of the animal questionnaire, which is required:

- *every 3 years* for low-risk animal species
- *annually* for high-risk animal species

The University's Training and Acknowledgement System (TRACKS) will send participants a reminder when they are due to submit an updated animal questionnaire.

TRACKS is the only reminder you will receive. Participants who are delinquent in submitting the updated questionnaire may be locked out of their animal protocol.

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Laboratory Animal Allergies

A laboratory animal allergy is an exaggerated reaction of the body's immune system to proteins. Animal allergies occur after repeated exposure to the animal proteins found in dander, urine, saliva, serum, or other body fluids. These animal proteins are called *allergens*.

Lab animal allergies are an occupational risk that can require medical treatment and may affect future career options. While most individuals who develop animal allergies will do so within the first two years of exposure, certain individuals may experience almost immediate reactions. Individuals with a prior history of asthma, hay fever, or an existing allergy to other animal species may have an increased risk for developing laboratory animal allergies.

Laboratory animal allergies can include several symptoms, including but not limited to:

- rhinitis – runny nose and sneezing
- conjunctivitis – irritation and watery eyes
- asthma – wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness, and cough
- atopic dermatitis – dry, itchy, inflamed, and cracked skin
- other skin manifestations – rash, wheals, or wheals

Individuals experiencing symptoms of LAA should inform their supervisor and contact the *HealthPoint* OHP immediately.

Work practices to reduce exposure to allergens include:

- Perform animal work in a ventilated hood or biological safety cabinet
- Minimize contact with allergens by wearing appropriate personal protective equipment in the work area, such as:
 - Surgical masks should be worn in animal housing areas to prevent contamination of the mucous membranes of the nose and mouth
 - Wear lab coats and hair covers while working with lab animals, if applicable
- Do not eat or drink in animal areas
- Wash your hands frequently, before leaving the work area and before eating and drinking
- Keep cages and animal areas clean
- Use HEPA filtered vacuums and wet cleaning procedures to wipe down animal areas.
- Perform administrative work outside of the animal housing areas
- Only allow authorized personnel into animal housing areas

The Occupational Health Program (OHP) and Environmental Health & Safety (EHS) departments are available to consult with individuals, principal investigators (PIs) and departments on the evaluation and implementation of engineering and administrative controls and PPE to reduce exposure to animal allergens.

To contact OHP, please call **512-471-4647**, email healthpoint.ohp@austin.utexas.edu, or visit our website at: <https://hr.utexas.edu/current/services/occupational-health-program>