



Cat Fact Sheet

Occupational Safety and Health Information

General Safety Information for Persons Working with Cats

The following information is intended to inform individuals who are involved with the care and use of animals about potential hazards (e.g., zoonoses, allergies, injuries) associated with working with various animal species and to provide information as to how they may lessen these hazards (e.g., personal hygiene, personal protective equipment [PPE]).

Zoonotic Diseases of Cats

Cats can carry organisms that may cause infection and disease in humans (zoonotic diseases, zoonoses) and these may be transmitted either directly (e.g., through bites) or indirectly (e.g., through exposure to feces). In general, cats maintained in research/teaching facilities have routine health maintenance (e.g., vaccination, de-wormed, parasite control) and are closely monitored for disease, so the likelihood of disease transmission to human is minimal. However, if you handle cats, you should be aware of a number of important diseases that cats may carry, including: **Plague, Rabies, Toxoplasma, Salmonella, Campylobacter** and **Ringworm**. Some of these diseases may not produce observable signs of illness in the cat; therefore, if you handle cats or their wastes you must take appropriate precautions to prevent transmission of these infections. You can view more information on these agents and other agents in [Appendix C](#) of the university Infection Prevention Program and the [Occupational Safety and Health Program for Animal Handlers](#). Please see the [Rabies Fact Sheet](#) for guidance on how to respond if there is a suspect exposure event.

Injuries from Handling Cats

Cats are generally social animals and respond well to frequent, gentle human contact. However, cats may become agitated when being restrained for procedures. Cats can inflict serious, deep bite wounds and prompt first-aid is particularly important when dealing with an injury from a cat. Scratches are also a hazard when dealing with cats, and can result in cat scratch fever, also called cat scratch disease. Cat scratch disease (CSD), is a bacterial infection caused by **Bartonella henselae** bacteria, and which can be treated with antibiotics. It is essential that people who handle cats for research or teaching be provided with training in proper handling techniques in order to avoid injury to themselves or the animals.

Allergic Reactions to Cats

Human, allergic reactions to cat fur and dander (skin flakes) are well documented. One cat allergen (a protein material which causes an allergic reaction in people) is produced by the oil glands of the skin which deposit the allergen on the cat's fur, but may also be found in the cat's saliva. People with allergies to cats may have sneezing, congestion, itchy and watery eyes and skin rash/itching when they are exposed to cats or to rooms and equipment used to house the cats.

How to Protect Yourself

Wash your Hands: The single most effective preventative measure that can be taken is thorough, regular hand washing. Wash hands and arms after handling cats. Never eat, drink or smoke in animal areas.

Wear Personal Protective Equipment: Laboratory coats, overalls, scrub suits, and gloves may be required when undertaking some tasks with cats, particularly cleaning their litter trays. Wash your hands and arms after removing your gloves. Face masks (e.g. N-95) should be used if you have allergies to cats. Respiratory protection (mask or respirator) should be worn during necropsy if there is a risk of aerosol transmission of a zoonotic disease. Employees who need to wear respiratory protection must be medically cleared by Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) before being fit tested with a respirator (if applicable). Complete the [medical survey form](#) to start this process if you are an employee. Students will be fit tested by EHS after providing our medical staff a note from your primary care physician, or after signing an 'informed consent' form at the time of service.

Tell your Physician you work with Cats: Whenever you are ill, even if you are not certain that the illness is work related, always mention to your physician that you work with cats. Many zoonotic diseases have flu-like symptoms and would not normally be suspected. Your physician needs this information to make an accurate diagnosis. Questions about personal human health should be answered by your physician.

Seek Medical Attention Promptly: If you are injured on the job (e.g., bitten) provide immediate first-aid. Stop the bleeding of wounds and wash the affected areas with soap and water. For fieldwork where soap and water may not be readily available, use of baby wipes (available in small portable packages) or alcohol-based cleansing gel is acceptable. Alcohol-based gels are neutralized by organic matter so the first application should be wiped off to remove debris, or the area can be cleaned first with a baby wipe, and the next application of gel can be left on the skin.

- Immediately report the incident to the facility director, your supervisor, or the teaching instructor if applicable.
- Those individuals needing immediate medical treatment for serious injuries may visit an appropriate healthcare provider for treatment (e.g., emergency room, primary care physician, students may also be treated at Student Health Services). Immediate medical treatment may be required if:
 - An individual's ability to breath properly is affected;
 - Bleeding is excessive and difficult to control;
 - An injury clearly needs sutures; or
 - There is a loss of consciousness associated with the incident.
- If you are working with a purposefully infected animal, the individual seeking medical attention must take a Hazard Summary sheet or agent SDS and present them to the healthcare provider prior to receiving services. It is important that the healthcare provider be made aware of the hazards present in the facility in order to appropriately diagnose and treat an individual.

- Employees' supervisor completes an [Employers' Accident Report](#) within 24 hours of the incident for employees. This document is specific to the Workers Compensation Program and is required prior to any follow-up medical services being provided for employees.
- The facility director or manager completes a General Incident Report form to be used by the facility director, facility manager, and Environmental Health & Safety for review of the incident.