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ost employees working in animal facilities find it similar to any other work environment. However, some employees may experience allergy symptoms that can be directly related to their work with or proximity to animals. Allergies can develop and the symptoms expressed even when there is no direct contact with animals.

WHY DO ANIMALS CAUSE ALLERGIES?

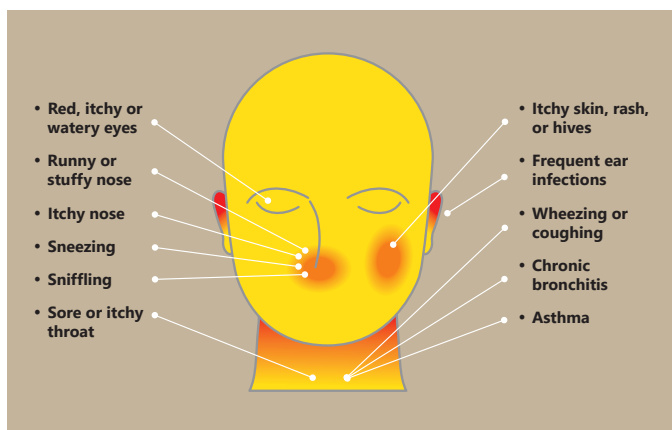
Proteins in animal dander and excrement (urine and feces) may cause allergic reactions. Proteins that cause allergies are called “allergens” and may exist as airborne particles in animal facilities.

CAN ANYONE BECOME ALLERGIC TO LABORATORY ANIMALS?

Individuals that have existing allergies, a family history or susceptibility to allergens, or suppressed immune systems may be at a higher risk for developing allergies. Others may develop allergies over time that increase in intensity as exposure increases; some may never experience allergies.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF ANIMAL ALLERGIES?

Allergy symptoms consist of the following: itchy eyes, nasal stuffiness, sneezing, coughing, wheezing, difficulty breathing, a tight chest, and rashes on the skin. These symptoms can range from mild to severe.



HOW DO I PROTECT MYSELF FROM ANIMAL ALLERGENS?

Three levels of control are employed to prevent workers from contact with animal allergens: engineering controls, workplace practices or administrative controls, and personal protective equipment (PPE).

Engineering Controls. For USC animal facilities, these include: biosafety cabinets, animal transfer stations, cage dumping stations, and individually ventilated caging systems. This HEPA-filtered containment equipment is maintained and calibrated to industry standards.

WHAT I NEED TO DO

- Know the signs and how to report in case of a suspected allergic reaction.
- Use engineering and administrative controls as well as appropriate PPE to reduce exposure to animal allergies.
- Complete an [ARA form](#) (see Administrative controls below).
- Wash hands after removal of protective gloves.

Air quality monitoring of high risk areas is provided by EH&S. Personal and area monitoring may be performed to determine the effectiveness of controls.

Administrative Controls. These include the Animal Exposure Program and Occupational Medicine for Biomedical Research. An Animal Exposure Risk Assessment form (ARA) that includes animal hazards, medical history, and factors that may influence allergy development is completed by the employee. An Occupational Medicine physician then reviews the completed ARA form. Based on the assessment, the following may be recommended: use of an N95 respirator, a follow-up evaluation with a physician, or both (refer to the ARA Fact Sheet for details).

PPE. The Department of Animal Resources (DAR) has a minimum PPE requirement for entering animal facilities that includes:

- Pants or other leg covering
- Closed-toe/closed heel shoes worn with socks
- Disposable, closed front gown
- Gloves
- Shoe covers
- Face mask
- Hair bonnet

Clothing that does not meet or exceed DAR requirements is not allowed in animal facilities.

REFERENCES

[NRC: Occupational Health and Safety in the Care and Use of Research Animals](#)
[NRC: Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals](#)
[NIOSH: Preventing Asthma in Animal Handlers](#)

