



THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY

Environment, Health, & Safety Office

INJURIES AND ILLNESSES FROM ANIMAL BITES, SCRATCHES, AND OTHER EXPOSURES

Animal bites and scratches carry the potential for uncommon infection or disease in addition to the direct trauma resulting from the injury. It is important that appropriate medical treatment be obtained promptly and that the physician is informed of the nature of the incident and of the potential for animal borne infection. Although the primary concern is with bites and scratches from laboratory mammals, injuries from fish and reptiles should be treated in the same fashion. Some zoonotic diseases can be contracted from exposure to airborne particles without direct contact with the animal. Salmonellosis is of concern and can be contracted from contact with many types of animals, including fish and reptiles. Finally, the mycobacteria in marine waters can cause infection non-intact skin has been in contact with raw water. Again it is very important that the physician be informed of the patient's potential exposure to these harmful agents. Additionally it is incumbent upon each person to maintain an up-to-date tetanus immunization.

All bites and scratches, no matter how small, from laboratory animals must be reported as soon as possible to the individual's supervisor or department head, the campus Workers' Compensation Office, and the Office of Safety and Environmental Programs. These persons, in consultation with the injured employee, and in some cases in consultation with a physician, will decide the course of action to take. The course of action depends on the nature and severity of the injury and may include on site first aid or treatment by a physician or both.

Injuries incurred "in the field" from wild animals should be treated as medical emergencies. If the injured person's skin is broken by the animal, medical attention from a physician should be obtained promptly. If it can be done without risk of further injury, the animal should be captured and held for observation and possible testing. Tick and flea exposures should be noted in a field log. Ticks should be removed as promptly as reasonably possible and the exposed individuals should monitor themselves for symptoms of Lyme Disease and other tick or insect borne illnesses.

Anyone seeking treatment from a physician for any sort of animal bite or scratch must inform the physician of the type of animal and the circumstances of the incident. If the injured person is aware of any potential health problems associated with the animal, whether as an individual, a species, or member of a larger group, the injured person must so inform the physician.

If an employee is injured by a non-laboratory raised animal, the following procedure will be followed.

- The injured employee immediately will be taken to an Emergency Department or "Urgent Care Clinic" for evaluation by a physician. The supervisor/Principal Investigator shall notify the campus Workers' Compensation Office and complete the First Report of Injury form within 24 hours of the incident. The supervisor/PI shall attach a copy of the research protocol or IACUC short field studies form to the injury report. Refer to [Injury & Illness Reporting Procedures](#).
- If it can be done without risk of further injury, the animal should be captured and held for observation and possible testing. Contact a veterinarian to examine the animal. The animal will be quarantined and not handled, except as required for humane feeding and care, for 10 days.

- After 10 days, the veterinarian will reexamine the animal. If the findings of the reexamination are normal, the animal may be put back into the animal colony.
- If the animal dies during the 10 day period, tests must be performed for rabies and, with the advice of the veterinarian and principal investigator, other animal borne diseases. Notification to the Department of Health, Peninsula Health District - Williamsburg Environmental Health Office shall be made if potential rabies exposure is suspected. The College Environment, Health, and Safety (EH&S) Office will make the notification and coordinate follow-up actions with the Williamsburg Environmental Health Office.
- The College EH&S Office must be informed of the incident and the results of the animal's reexamination and subsequent tests, if any. Appropriate records of all actions must be forwarded to the EH&S Office where a file of the records of such incidents is maintained.

Individuals that work with laboratory animals and see a physician for any reason should inform the physician of that fact and further provide the physician with information on zoonotic ailments associated with those animals.

As persons who work in the field are apt to have small cuts and scratches on their hands or arms, they are at risk for contracting infections as a result of handling marine organisms or from exposure to the raw water. Persons who have such occupational exposures should inform any physician they might consult of that circumstance.

Finally, good personal hygiene, especially frequent and thorough hand washing, is a strong defense against contracting many illnesses. Field workers should carry hand sanitizers with them for use when a potable water supply is not readily available for hand washing.

For more information on the College's policies regarding the use of animals in research, refer to the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee's [Policy and Procedures for Research and Teaching Involving Live Vertebrate Animals](#).