



# ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & SAFETY

## 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.** Sources of exposure may include bites and scratches from laboratory mammals or wild animals, injuries from fish and reptiles, contact with non-intact skin with bacteria (i.e. salmonellosis) or even marine waters containing mycobacteria. Some zoonotic diseases (infections spread between people and animals) can be contracted from exposure to airborne particles without direct contact with the animal. 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 Principal Investigator (PI), the campus Workers' Compensation Office (employees only), and the Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S) Office. Promptly reporting exposures (e.g., bites, scratches, or injuries) will ensure appropriate and timely treatment. 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. Utilize the [Animal Bite Form](#) for reporting.

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. Follow the procedure below for injuries by a non-laboratory-raised animal. 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, any zoonotic ailments associated with the 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 procedure below will be followed:

- The injured employee immediately will go to an urgent care facility or emergency room for evaluation by a physician. The supervisor/PI shall notify the campus Workers' Compensation Office and follow instructions found in the [Workers' Compensation Checklist](#) 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 report. If conditions warrant, a physician in the Panel Physicians Form will be utilized. This may not be possible if you are out of the geographic area or require a higher level of medical care from an emergency room.

- For animal bites, also complete the [Animal Bite Form](#)
- 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. Notify the University EH&S Office at [Safety@wm.edu](mailto:Safety@wm.edu) (outside of normal business hours call 757-221-1643) if potential rabies exposure is suspected. EH&S will notify the Virginia Department of Health and coordinate follow-up actions.
- The 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.

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

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