Policy Statement

The University of Dundee recognises that, despite all practicable safeguards which the University can implement, anyone working with, or in the vicinity of, laboratory animals is at risk of developing an allergy to them. Therefore everyone who works with or near laboratory animals must be under appropriate health surveillance to detect the onset and progression of allergic symptoms so that additional protective measures can be implemented where necessary.

Arrangements

Deans will ensure all staff and students (Users) working with, or in the vicinity of, laboratory animals comply with these arrangements, and take appropriate action if a User develops an allergy.

All Users and staff working in Resource Units must read the Guidance Note on Laboratory Animal Allergy. They must report symptoms to OH Service and their line manager immediately.

Director of Biological Services will prevent new staff and Users from entering Resource Units until they have been approved to do so by the University Occupational Health Service. S/he will ensure visitors are asked if they have an allergy to animals before they enter the Resource Unit.

Head of Safety Services will formulate arrangements to ensure all staff and Users who work with or near laboratory animals are under health surveillance, and review these arrangements regularly.

The University Occupational Health Service will organise health surveillance to detect the onset and progression of an allergy to laboratory animals. This surveillance follows the British Occupational Health Research Foundation Guidelines. The level of surveillance is based upon level of exposure and history of symptoms. It relies upon reporting of symptoms by staff and post-graduate students who have all been informed of the symptoms, and the need
to report symptoms immediately. This need is reinforced by OH Service nurses during the initial health surveillance consultation.

The University Occupational Health Service will maintain records, take appropriate action if individuals develop an allergy and send an annual report on the incidence and severity of laboratory animal allergy to Head of Safety Services

Further information and advice can be obtained from Safety Services ext. 84104.
Guidance Note on Laboratory Animal Allergy

1. Introduction
In the light of recent studies we now realise that you are at a significant risk of developing an allergy when working with, or in the vicinity of laboratory animals in Resource Units. This guidance note gives general information on laboratory animal allergy, and the measures implemented by the University to minimise your risk of developing an allergy.

2. Information on Laboratory Animal Allergy

Symptoms
Symptoms of laboratory animal allergy can occur at any time after starting work in a Resource Unit but commonly develop within six months.

Symptoms include:
1. sneezing and running nose (rhinitis);
2. sore and runny eyes (conjunctivitis);
3. skin rashes, or weals on the skin around bites and scratches (urticaria);
4. tightness of chest and wheezing (asthma);
5. anaphylactic shock.

Rhinitis and conjunctivitis are the symptoms most likely to develop. Allergic asthma is an important health problem as this may damage lung function. Asthma may occur during work or several hours after work, typically in the late evening. Life threatening anaphylactic reactions have been known to occur.

Cause
Repeated exposure to allergens from body tissue, excretions or secretions of most mammalian species, insects and birds may lead to an allergic response developing in some individuals. Some allergens have been identified (eg proteins in rat urine) but usually they remain unidentified. Urine, hair/fur,
dander/animal dandruff, saliva, serum and venom are potential sources of unidentified allergens.

Exposure to allergens occurs:
1. through breaks in the skin caused by scratches, bites or sharp instruments;
2. by inhalation of allergens deposited on to fur, feathers, bedding and cages becoming airborne through both animal and human activity.

**People at risk**

Only some people exposed to allergens will develop an allergic response. It is not possible to predict whether an individual will develop an allergic response to an animal allergen. However, once sensitised to an allergen an individual can experience symptoms following subsequent exposure to very low levels of that allergen. This increased responsiveness following further exposure to the same or reduced dose of an allergen is allergen specific and probably irreversible. It is likely that short-term exposure to high levels of an allergen may initiate this process.

**3. Preventative Measures for Laboratory Animal Allergy**

**Risk assessment**

Animal allergens are ‘substances hazardous to health’ as defined by the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002. Therefore, a detailed assessment of the risks to health created by working with laboratory animals has been documented and Resource Unit Managers hold copies for inspection. Essentially the risk assessment details measures to prevent or at least minimise your exposure to allergens and the health surveillance arrangements to protect your health.

**Personal protective equipment**

On entry to the Resource Unit you must put on a dedicated laboratory coat (a different colour to normal laboratory coat) and overshoes or use ‘sticky mat’. Disposable gloves should be worn as appropriate to protect against urine and
contaminated bedding. This protective clothing must be removed before exit: under no circumstances should protective clothing be taken back to the laboratory.

You may need to wear respiratory protective equipment to reduce exposure to airborne animal allergens. Disposable masks must comply with European Standard EN 149 and have a minimum rating of FFP 3(S). Ventilated powered respirators must comply to European Standard EN 146 and have a minimum rating of P3 (S).

**Health surveillance**

You must be under health surveillance to detect onset of allergic response and to prevent progression to severe symptoms. Individuals not under health surveillance must contact University Occupational Health (Ewing Annexe, Ext. 85410) immediately, and notify their supervisor.

Anyone who develops allergic symptoms after working in Resource Units must notify University Occupational Health and their supervisor immediately.

**Resource units**

- have a ventilation system that reduces the levels of respirable allergens;
- consist of several independent units for housing the animals;
- are easy to clean with washable floors, walls and ceilings;
- have a separate and special facility for cage cleaning;
- have waste bins with lids for disposal of used gloves, masks etc;
- have adequate facilities for washing;
- have separate office and rest room facilities;
- have arrangements for laundering and cleaning protective clothing.

**System of work**

- keeps the number of animals in each unit to the minimum;
- includes frequent cleaning;
- uses dust free bedding;
- transport animals outside Resource Units in double boxes ;
ensures use of animals outside Resource Unit is kept to a minimum;
uses low dust woodchip in litter trays;
prohibits eating, drinking, smoking and report writing in units.

4. Further Consequences
For some allergic individuals further contact with animals must be avoided. This may have far reaching consequences: for example cessation of a research project, change in occupation, or need to retrain.

5. Accident/Incident Reporting
You must report accidents/incidents when working in Resource Units to the Resource Unit Manager, and your supervisor.

6. Further Information
Contact Safety Services (ext 84104) or Occupational Health (ext.85410) for further information.