

Guidance on Conducting Research Involving Animals During Covid-19 Restrictions

Animal Ethics FAQ. UPDATE 1.4.2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting all members of the community, including our Western Sydney research community. Information and advice from Government, Health agencies and the University is changing constantly and the key message for all researchers is to be aware of that advice and adhere to it.

The Western Sydney University Animal Care and Ethics Committee (ACEC) provides the following advice for researchers engaged in the use of animals for research purposes.

These FAQs will be updated regularly. If you would like a copy of the latest FAQs please email animaethics@westernsydney.edu.au

1. Will the ACEC still meet to review new applications, annual reports and amendments?

ACEC will continue to meet via Zoom to review applications, reports and amendments. The meeting schedule for 2020 remains unchanged. Please visit

https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/research/research_ethics_and_integrity/animal for more information.

Researchers still have a responsibility to adhere to the annual reporting requirements as set out in the Australian Code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes (2013), and any other conditions listed on their Animal Research Authority (ARA).

2. I currently have an ongoing experiment, should I continue it?

On-going experiments involving animals may continue only if they are regarded to be absolutely essential and critical for data collection. However, procedures requiring invasive surgery, pain relief and additional monitoring requirements should be completed by mid-April.

Please discuss with your supervisor or the Dean of your School/Institute Director to decide if your current experiment/work is critical and requires you to be on campus. You will need to gain specific approval from your School Dean/Institute Director for particular projects by providing them with the following information:

- An outline of animal numbers to be kept in the facility per week;
- Whether experiments are critical to be continued due to the stage that they are currently at (e.g. final stages of experiments); and
- The impact of stopping the experiments now

Tasks that are deemed essential should be communicated by the School/Institute to animal facilities staff and the ethics team (animaethics@westernsydney.edu.au) in order to facilitate access to animal facilities/laboratories at this time. For this, the following information will be required to enable the university to provide access to facilities, laboratories etc:

- The names and positions of the researchers carrying out the experiments
- Date / time / location of experiments so that access can be granted to otherwise restricted areas

Staff and researchers are reminded that they are required to practice physical distancing and undertake additional precautions regarding personal protective equipment, cleaning, handwashing and general hygiene when working on campus.

3. I have some new experiments planned, am I able to start them now?

New experiments due to start over the next few months will need to be postponed until further notice.

4. What should I do if I have animals currently being held at WSU animal facilities?

Please discuss with your supervisor and/or the animal facility staff about available options given the current situation. This may involve, but is not limited to:

- discussing plans to maintain animals over an extended period with minimal staff;
- ensuring adequate monitoring requirements are in place;
- nominating members of the research team to assist in animal care and maintenance; and
- potential reduction of animal numbers where possible

The International Council for Laboratory Animal Science (ICLAS) has also published a guide that includes recommendations to assist with emergency planning and care for laboratory animals in the event that animal care staff numbers are reduced. The guide can be found at the following link:

https://www.anzlaa.org/resources/ICLAS%20Enews%20April%202020_FINAL.pdf

5. Should I order new animals for my experiments or to maintain my lines?

Animal orders for experimental purposes must be put on hold, unless required to maintain breeding lines or longitudinal studies.

6. Will the situation change monitoring requirements?

Animals currently held should be monitored as required and outlined in your project approval. Until further notice, animal facility staff are also continuing to provide routine animal care. Chief Investigators should discuss with their staff and the animal facility staff and review their emergency plans and ensure that contingency plans are in place for the ongoing care of the animals bred, housed and used at WSU. In particular, the following points should be considered:

- How animals will be monitored and cared for if staff numbers were reduced?
- Are the appropriate emergency contacts in place, in case an animal welfare issue arises?

7. My research was delayed by the COVID-19 situation, what should I do?

If your research has been/will be delayed due to the current COVID-19 situation, it may be possible to extend your project approval period beyond the specified maximum period of 3 years. More information will be provided soon.

8. What other information about the Covid-19 situation and University activities is available to me?

The University's Vice Chancellor is making regular updates via email. The Department of Primary Industries have also published a COVID-19 page that includes information on animal welfare [here](#). There is advice from the [IT Coronavirus webpage](#). There are health and wellbeing tips [here](#).

Please be assured that all Research Services staff, including the ethics team and the ethics committees, continue to work to assist the Western Sydney University's research community through this period and come out the other side ready to move forward. As all staff are now offsite, if you want to speak with an ethics team member please email animaethics@westernsydney.edu.au and provide a phone number or outline your query in the email.