

Information for Students Using Vertebrate Animals at UCSB

You are being provided with this information sheet because you will be using vertebrate animals as part of your course work. It will provide you with general information on health issues and legal responsibilities relating to the use of vertebrate animals in teaching and research. The information herein is related solely to the use of VERTEBRATE animals in teaching and research.

Is it OK to use vertebrate animals in academic courses?

The use of animals by students can be an important component of science education as long as it is supervised by teachers who are properly trained in the welfare and use of animals in laboratory or field settings and is conducted by institutions capable of providing proper oversight¹. Before vertebrate animals can be used in either teaching or research settings at UCSB, the proposed procedures to be used must be reviewed and approved by the UCSB Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), which assesses the procedures to be employed, as well as the relevance/justification of the proposed vertebrate animal use. The IACUC is a federally mandated committee (under the PHS Policy and USDA Animal Welfare Act) composed of scientists, non-scientists, the campus veterinarian, and at least one community member. The IACUC is charged with ensuring that the use of animals in research and teaching is performed according to the highest standards, and ensuring that all federal laws, regulations and policies are followed in the conduct of research or teaching efforts that involve animals. The IACUC's review also includes careful consideration of the moral and ethical significance of using animals for teaching and research purposes.

Where do vertebrate animals live at UCSB and who cares for them?

The types of vertebrate animals used in teaching at UCSB range from wildlife used in the field to laboratory rodents that are used in laboratory settings. Day-to-day care of animals that are housed on campus is performed by trained personnel. For animals that are housed, all environmental parameters are carefully monitored and appropriate husbandry is provided for each species. The UCSB campus veterinarian is responsible for overseeing the veterinary clinical care of all vertebrate animals associated with UCSB teaching activities, on and off campus.

Are there potential risks to people when they use vertebrate animals in a classroom or other academic setting?

Yes. Whenever people are in contact with vertebrate animals, there are risks that should be considered. The most common risks fall into three categories:

1. Allergies, which can develop following contact with some vertebrate animals, primarily mammals (allergic symptoms include nasal stuffiness, running nose, sneezing, red or irritated eyes and in some cases may present with a cough and possibly asthma);
2. Physical, such as bites or scratches; and
3. Diseases, specifically those that can be transferred from vertebrate animals to humans (i.e., zoonotic). The specific risks depend on the species of animal being contacted.

The most common problem for people working with vertebrate animals is the development of allergies, usually to laboratory mice or rats, especially if you have a family history of allergies such as hay fever, asthma, or eczema. Your professor should provide you with information about the potential risks posed by the vertebrate animals you will work with in class.

How should I protect myself when using vertebrate animals for coursework?

- Allergy – Your exposure to laboratory animals (i.e., mice and rats) in class will generally be infrequent and relatively brief in duration, therefore it is unlikely that you will develop an allergy. However, you

¹ American Association for the Advancement of Science. Resolution on the Use of Animals in Research, Testing and Education. <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.11642765>

should err on the side of caution. Wearing gloves, washing your hands, and even wearing a dust mask (also known as a filtering-face piece respirator) are recommended (and may be required in some classes). Avoid bringing the laboratory animals close to your face and consider changing and washing your clothes as soon as possible after your class. The risk posed by animal allergies when working in an open-air field setting is minimal.

- Physical Risks – You may or may not handle vertebrate animals during your coursework, but if you do so, your instructor will teach you how to use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and handle the vertebrate animals appropriately. Proper handling protects both you and the vertebrate animals. Your instructor will also teach you about the various safety precautions that should be taken when working in a field setting (e.g., snake boots, bug repellent, sun block).
- Disease – Working with wild-caught animals (particularly mammals) can present the risk of disease transmission to humans. Most of these risks can be mitigated through the use of appropriate PPE (e.g., gloves). The laboratory animals housed on campus that are used for teaching do not carry any diseases that can be transferred to humans. Regardless, always wear gloves while handling vertebrate animals and wash your hands afterwards.

What is the UCSB Occupational Health and Safety Program?

In order to identify individuals who might be at risk from allergies and zoonotic diseases, the UCSB IACUC and Office of Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) have created an Occupational Health and Safety Program (OHSP). This program enables personnel working with vertebrate animals (including students) to fill out a confidential OHS evaluation form that is reviewed by an OHS Physician who evaluates the potential health risks related to the vertebrate animal work. If the Physician determines that there is a possible health risk, then s/he provides a recommendation for an appropriate course of protection. Depending on the vertebrate animals and activities in your class, you may wish to enroll in the OHSP for vertebrate animal users. The OHS enrollment form can be accessed at https://www.research.ucsb.edu/sites/default/files/forms/iacuc/ohs_form.pdf.

You may request participation in the OHSP by filling out the enrollment form and mailing it through the US Postal System to the OHS Physician in a sealed envelope. The address is on the form. Do not try to use email. These will be handled confidentially by the OHS Physician. There is no cost to you to participate in the OHSP.

What else should I do?

1. Learn how to handle vertebrate animals properly. Ask if you are unsure of anything.
2. Understand the potential risks of your activities and know the relevant signs or symptoms of potential problems. Make use of appropriate PPE.
3. Read and understand the IACUC Animal Care and Use Protocol associated with your course. Your professor can provide you with a copy of the protocol.
4. If you are writing a report or blog about your experience of working with animals, you should communicate respect for the animal subjects, and maintain a reverent tone regarding the animal's role in the project.
5. If you suspect an animal is or has been mistreated or not receiving proper care, you may report any concerns to the Attending Veterinarian at 805-893-7344 or 805-451-5931, the IACUC Chair at 805-893-2659, the IACUC Office at 805-893-5855, the Research Integrity Office within the Office of Research at 805-893-4286, or animalwelfareconcerns@research.ucsb.edu. Reports can also be made anonymously through the UC Whistleblower Hotline at 800-403-4744.
6. If you have any more questions regarding the use of animals in your class, visit the IACUC website at <https://www.research.ucsb.edu/animal-subjects/about>, email the IACUC Office at iacuc@lifesci.ucsb.edu, or call 805-893-5855. When contacting the IACUC, it is best to identify yourself as a student in a class that uses vertebrate animals and the course number.