

Laboratory Animal Allergies

Prolonged exposure to animal allergens in the workplace may lead to laboratory animal allergies (LAA) or asthma. Inhalation is the most common route for allergens to enter someone's body. Over a period of time a person may be exposed to a sufficient amount of allergen to become sensitized. Once sensitized, the person's next exposure to that allergen will cause an allergic reaction. Common symptoms of an allergic reaction are listed below. Protecting yourself from being exposed to animal allergens will decrease your risk of acquiring LAA or asthma.

Symptoms of allergic reaction

- itchy, watery eyes
- itchy, runny nose
- chest tightness
- wheezing
- shortness of breath

Sources of allergens from animals

- fur
- dander
- feces or urine
- saliva
- serum

If you think you are experiencing a LAA

- review this fact sheet
- discuss your symptoms with your supervisor
- contact Occupational Medicine at (515) 294-2056

Preventing LAAs

1. Do not wear street clothes while working with animals and leave work clothes at the workplace to be laundered.
2. Keep cages and animals clean.
3. Use ventilated animal cage racks or filter-top animal cages.
4. Reduce skin contact of animals and their allergens by wearing proper personal protective equipment, including gloves, lab coat and eye protection.
5. Reduce the amount of animal allergens you are inhaling by wearing a respirator.
6. Contact EH&S at (515) 294-5359 for more information about the Respiratory Protection Program.
7. When performing animal manipulations or handling used bedding, do so within a biosafety cabinet or ventilated hood.
8. Wash your hands after exiting animal rooms.
9. Shower after working with animals.
10. Participate in training about animal allergies and how to reduce your risk.

References:

1. NIOSH Alert: Preventing Asthma in Animal Handlers, DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 97-116, January 1998.
2. Occupational Health and Safety in the Care and Use of Research Animals, National Academy Press, Washington, DC, September 2007, p 51-64.