

POLICY NUMBER: A-007

TITLE: Visitors in the VAPHS Animal Research Facility

1.0 PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that collaborators, visitors and observers at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS) who are exposed to some risk of contact with laboratory animals or their products are informed of the risks associated with visiting the Animal Research Facility (ARF) or observing procedures. This policy also provides guidance for the conduct of collaborators, visitors or observers to assure the VAPHS’s commitment to the ethical treatment of laboratory animals. VAPHS must be assured that observation of any aspect of animal use will in no way bring harm to the animals, and that collaborators, visitors and observers are aware that potential hazards with observing animal procedures or visiting any animal facilities exist. VAPHS advocates a high quality animal care program and by doing so, assures the public, researchers and employees that there is a true commitment to assuring the well being of collaborators, visitors and observers to our animal facilities and the animals housed therein.

2.0 REVISION HISTORY

R&D Committee Approval Date	Revision #	Change	Reference Section(s)	Effective Date
October 23, 2012	N/A	New Policy		November 1, 2012

3.0 SCOPE

This policy applies to all visitors to the VAPHS ARF.

4.0 DEFINITIONS

Authorized Guide: Member of the ARF staff or IACUC approved protocol personnel.

Visitor: This includes anyone not otherwise authorized to enter the ARF to observe animal research or have direct contact with laboratory animals as part of their specific academic position or job responsibilities at the VAPHS or by law or regulation. For the purpose of this policy, a visitor could be a non-VAPHS employee who has specific scientific or educational purpose to enter the ARF to observe an animal procedure or participate in aspects of experiments that do not include animal handling or animal procedures. A visitor could be a VAPHS employee, fellow, or student not included as an authorized and trained personnel in an IACUC approved protocol. Use of visitor status under this policy for such employees, fellows or students is intended for no more than 5 visits. VAPHS employees, fellows, and

students requiring more than 5 visits to the ARF are expected to complete all IACUC mandated training and be added to the IACUC approved protocol.

Visitors do NOT include:

1. Employees, fellows and students of the VAPHS or the University of Pittsburgh authorized to participate in one or more VAPHS IACUC approved protocols.
2. A non-VAPHS consultant specifically evaluated and authorized by the IACUC to perform hands-on technical research support services (for example, induction, maintenance and recovery from general anesthesia) on animals housed in the facility.
3. An outside vendor or a VAPHS employee not otherwise approved on a specific IACUC approved protocol, but authorized by the facility for the purpose of facility maintenance or inspection.

Animal Facility: Any VAPHS managed area that houses experimental animals of any species. Animal facilities may include animal housing areas, procedure areas, storage rooms, office space and hallways.

5.0 POLICY

Visitors may be permitted in the ARF if approved, in advance, by the VAPHS Research Office and VAPHS Police and provided that the ARF Supervisor be advised of and oversee any visitation, as long as appropriate safeguards are in place to screen visitors for health issues related to animal exposure and the visitor is accompanied at all times by an authorized guide. This notice will require email consent at VHAPTHARF@va.gov

Authorized guides must notify the Research Office and Police Services that they will be sponsoring a visitor. The guide must provide the Research Office and Police Services with the visitor's name, the reason for the visit, the planned visit time, estimated time of check out and facility location by email or in writing at least **1 business day** in advance of the visit. The authorized guide must instruct visitors who may have been in another animal facility within the last 24 hours that they must have showered and wear a completely different change of clothes, including shoes. Please refer to VAPHS Policy (Animal Biosecurity Policy, A-005). For visitors who wish to enter rooms where animals are housed, it is suggested that notice be given at least 2 weeks in advance so that the IACUC can ensure that Occupational Health requirements have been met or that facility access will be approved by the IACUC.

It is the responsibility of the ARF Supervisor and/or authorized guide to inform the visitor that the ARF may pose health risks to individuals who have allergies to animals, animal dander, or those who are immunocompromised. Such persons should be advised to avoid entering the ARF where animals are housed or to take all appropriate precautions to avoid or limit exposure. If there is any question regarding a risk to the visitor's health, the visit must not occur until such time as the visitor is clearly informed of the risks involved. It is also the responsibility of the authorized guide to discuss with the visitor the risks he or she may pose to research animals. Persons who have active tuberculosis, influenza, or other respiratory diseases are not permitted to visit the ARF.

The need for Occupational Health to perform risk assessment for visitors will depend on the level of risk to the visitor, to the experimental animals, and to the research. The IACUC will determine level of risk depending on whether the visitor, intends to enter the ARF or procedure rooms when animals are in residence or just entering hallways and business areas of the ARF. **All visitors will be offered participation in the VAPHS Occupational Health program.**

All visitors must follow facility rules regarding gowning and donning personal protective equipment (PPE). No visitor will be allowed to have physical contact with animals and their housing in the ARF.

Visitors must be under the direct supervision of an authorized guide at all times during a tour or visit.

Visitors shall not be permitted to take still or video photographs of the ARF unless prior approval has been granted by the VAPHS IACUC and VAPHS Research Office, if applicable.

FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY

This policy will be reviewed annually, and revised as needed.

//electronically signed//

Gretchen L. Haas, PhD
Research and Development Committee Chair

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Steven H. Graham, MD, PhD
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