



LABA Policy Statement

Checking of animals to assure their health and well being

Organisations and individuals that breed or otherwise maintain animals intended for use in scientific procedures have an obligation to put in place systems to ensure the continuing health and well-being of the animals. In general this will mean that animals will be checked at regular intervals, at least once daily. Whatever the frequency, these checks will be sufficient to determine that suitable environmental conditions and adequate food and water are provided that the social needs of the animals are maintained and that there are no undue concerns for their health and welfare.

The nature of these periodic checks on the larger species of laboratory animals, e.g. dogs, cats and non-human primates, will vary according to the status of individual animals. Animals that are housed in large social groups can be visually assessed during normal husbandry regimes such as pen cleaning, feeding, or social play. Appropriate checks of these larger species should be made at least once daily.

Experience and observation has demonstrated that the application of over-intrusive and regular checking regimes can have adverse consequences on certain categories of breeding animals, particularly rodents. For example, mice may reject or cannibalise their young. Rabbits often show unsettled behaviour and neglect or cannibalise disturbed youngsters. Guinea pigs can be distressed if foraging material under which they hide is removed to facilitate observation.

Animals in commercial breeding colonies are generally healthy, free from infectious disease and in good physical condition. Experience has demonstrated that, in these circumstances, it is very uncommon to identify unhealthy animals. Generalised assessments of colony well-being and the continued observation of a normal colony state, such as confirmation of a consistent food and drinking water intake across a large number of cages, provide useful and valuable reassurance of the well-being of the animals. Where disturbance is likely to have detrimental effects, the extent of physical examination must always be balanced against the likelihood of identifying animals in need of urgent attention and, the nature and frequency of periodic checks should, in consultation with the Named Veterinary Surgeon, be tailored to individual circumstance.

In addition to checking the animals themselves, whole colony breeding records, combined with the output of regular health screening conducted under an accredited screening programme, such as the Laboratory Animal Breeders Association Health Monitoring Scheme, should be used in evaluating well-being.

Where animals are bred under the authority of a project licence, the extent of checking should be related to any anticipated adverse effects on health or well-being. Where deleterious physical conditions are likely to arise, additional regular clinical assessment of the animals, should be considered to augment systems used to otherwise monitor the health and well-being of normal stocks of animals.