

## Preventing Asthma in Animal Handlers

### **WARNING!**

**Exposure to animals or animal products in the workplace can cause asthma and allergies.**

#### **Animal handlers should take steps to protect themselves from exposure to animals and animal products:**

- Perform animal manipulations within ventilated hoods or safety cabinets when possible.
- Avoid wearing street clothes while working with animals.
- Leave work clothes at the workplace to avoid potential exposure problems for family members.
- Keep cages and animal areas clean.
- Reduce skin contact with animal products such as dander, serum, and urine by using gloves, lab coats, and approved particulate respirators with faceshields.

#### **Employers of animal handlers should take steps to protect workers from exposure to animals and animal products:**

##### Modify ventilation and filtration systems:

- Increase the ventilation rate and humidity in the animal-housing areas.

- Ventilate animal-housing and -handling areas separately from the rest of the facility.

- Direct airflow away from workers and toward the backs of the animal cages.

- Install ventilated animal cage racks or filter-top animal cages.

- Decrease animal density (number of animals per cubic meter of room volume).
- Keep cages and animal areas clean.
- Use absorbent pads for bedding. If these are not available, use corncob bedding instead of sawdust bedding.
- Use an animal species or sex that is known to be less allergenic than others.
- Provide protective equipment for animal handlers—gloves, lab coats, and approved particulate respirators with faceshields.
- Provide training to educate workers about animal allergies and steps for risk reduction.
- Provide health monitoring and appropriate counseling and medical followup for workers who have become sensitized or have developed allergy symptoms.

For additional information, see ***NIOSH Alert: Preventing Asthma in Animal Handlers*** [DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 97-116]. Single copies of the Alert are available free from the following:

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