COVID-19 Resources
Protected: COVID-19 FAQs for the Research Community

Americans for Medical Progress has created the following list of frequently asked questions for internal use by research organizations to assist them in communicating about various issues throughout the COVID-19 outbreak. We will continuously expand this FAQ as needed or requested.

We have also created a separate public FAQ about the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak on research facilities and research animals. It can be found at this link.

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Questions About the Importance of Transparency During the COVID-19 Outbreak

Question: What is AMP’s advice when it comes to public communications about the use of animals in research during the COVID-19 outbreak? More specifically, how should we communicate about decisions regarding animals involved in non-essential research?

AMP is aware of several attempts by research opponents to generate public anxiety and anger about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on research animals. These groups have falsely accused research organizations of euthanizing animals when in fact those institutions have only discussed plans for these animals if the worse-case scenario were to occur.

This is why it’s important for research organizations to keep the public proactively informed about the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on staff.
be euthanized as a result of the outbreak, explain now and why the institution came to this conclusion and be certain to emphasize the decision was not taken lightly.

As we know from past experience, animal research opponents frequently portray a lack of transparency in the worst light possible. When they identify a void in communications, they are known to insert their own narrative and opinions. This is why it’s important for organizations to proactively explain their decisions and the reasoning that led up to them.

We recognize that these can be difficult messages to develop. We are happy to provide ideas or perspectives if desired. Email us at jim@amprogress.org or call us at 202-624-8811.

**Question: What should institutions specifically communicate to the public about the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on research animals?**

Over the upcoming weeks, there will be a wide variety of questions that will be asked by the general public. These include:

- What is your organization/university doing to combat the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Are students and staff at risk?
- What are you doing to minimize that risk?
- Will non-essential research in animals be placed on hold and why?
- What will happen to those animals?
- When and if a study is halted due to the pandemic, can the involved research animals be adopted? Why or why not?
- Why are these decisions being made now? Why not wait until we know more?

This is a brief list of the many questions that will likely be asked over the upcoming weeks. We encourage all research organizations to proactively generate responses to these inquiries and more.
AMP encourages all research organizations to create an online FAQ about the impacts of COVID-19 on their research operations and post it at an easy-to-find location on your website. Another option is to address these questions in a public blog post or at another highly visible online location.

At some point, your institution may also decide to issue a press release to proactively answer questions about the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak on research operations, staff and animals.

**Question:** Can you share examples of how organizations are effectively communicating with staff and/or the public about these issues?

Certainly. Here are some examples of how research organizations are communicating with their own staff and the general public about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on research animals. We will expand this list as we locate additional resources. Feel free to contact us at paula@amprogress.org to share other examples.

- **Drexel University:** [Research Involving Animal Models](https://www.drexel.edu/index.php)
- **Harvard University:** [Research and Labs Preparedness for COVID-19](https://www.harvard.edu)
- **Johns Hopkins University:** [Research Preparedness](https://www.jhu.edu)
- **Pennsylvania State University:** [COVID-19: Animal Care and Use | Office of the Senior Vice President for Research at Penn State](https://www.psu.edu)
- **Purdue University:** [Guidance from Purdue Animal Care and Use Committee](https://www.purdue.edu)
- **Texas A&M University:** [Research Guidance During COVID-19](https://www.tamu.edu)
- **University of Florida:** [Impact of COVID-19 on Research and Sponsored Programs](https://www.ufl.edu)

[https://www.amprogress.org/covid-19-resources/coronavirus/](https://www.amprogress.org/covid-19-resources/coronavirus/)
Questions about responding to animal rights claims in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Question: How are animal rights groups responding to the outbreak?
the United States have remained fairly quiet as the number of coronavirus cases have rapidly grown across the United States.

However, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and a few other groups have been very vocal. PETA sent a letter to at least one university, pressuring it to immediately end all animal tests. It is expected that a number of other institutions will receive this same communication. Stop Animal Exploitation Now has also continued to send letters to research organizations as it has before the outbreak. One recent letter from SAEN urged a university to permanently shutdown all animal tests.

In an email to supporters, Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine criticized “painfully slow animal tests” being used to develop new treatments and vaccines to combat the pandemic. PETA has continued its campaign against Texas A&M University, placing ads on Austin buses. The ads were likely timed to appear during the South by Southwest Conference, which was cancelled in response to the pandemic. The group has also urged Air France to stop shipping nonhuman primates for biomedical research, even for studies on COVID-19.
Finally, both Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine and PETA have urged supporters to help them lobby federal lawmakers for financial relief in response to the economic turmoil caused by the coronavirus outbreak.

**Question:** My institution received a letter from an animal rights group related to our COVID-19 studies or our decisions about animals not involved in coronavirus research. Any advice about what we should do?

Some groups continue to aggressively criticize animal studies, despite the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic and the urgent need for animal research to help save lives. PETA has issued press releases urging institutions to “close down animal labs.” They’ve also accused research organizations of needlessly euthanizing animals not involved in COVID-19 studies. Stop Animal Exploitation Now has sent letters to university presidents and even urged federal agencies to deny coronavirus funding to certain organizations.

Here’s AMP’s advice for managing these issues if they surface at your institution:

**Recognize these are media campaigns and respond accordingly**

Groups opposed to animal-based research have seen the many news stories highlighting the critical role of animals in developing COVID-19 treatments and vaccines. They’ve also heard Dr. Anthony Fauci’s recent comments on the critical role of animals in developing a COVID-19 vaccine and they feel they must respond. Some have chosen to do this by targeting individual institutions. Therefore, we advise impacted organizations to prepare media messages that comprehensively respond to the claims being made. Highlight how animals are being used to combat COVID-19 at your institution. If other studies have been placed on hold, explain why this is the case. If an animal rights group is raising questions about decisions or discussions related to euthanizing animals, additional advice can be found below.
University presidents and chancellors are often the primary recipients of letters from animal rights groups. Sometimes a response makes sense to place important facts on the record. If you choose to respond, we suggest the letter come from the research administration office. We also frequently remind institutions to remember their primary audience is not the activist group itself, but the general public. Having a response letter that refutes activist claims or explains the organization’s thorough decision making process can sometimes be helpful. For instance, it may be something to release to a reporter or to the general public.

**Monitor media closely to determine if animal rights claims are receiving attention**

In many cases, press releases and other attempts by animal rights groups to gain news coverage during an international crisis will likely not receive significant attention. However, when a research organization becomes aware of a release, it’s still a good idea to closely watch for coverage on that issue and rapidly respond as needed.

**Use external resources**

AMP is closely tracking the claims being made by research opponents as the COVID-19 pandemic expands. We are also locating data and helping to create response messages. For example, one false statement that has been circulating recently is the claim that vaccines are being tested without the use of animal studies. Information and messaging that addresses this can be found in our public FAQ.

**Contact us if you need assistance**

AMP has staff on hand who have dealt with these kinds of issues firsthand. We’ve also assisted several other organizations in responding. We’re happy to provide our thoughts and advice via phone or video conference as needed. Just email us at paula@amprogress.org or jim@amprogress.org.
animals?

We’ve spoken with several institutions about their care of animals not involved in COVID-19 studies. Some are continuing all animal-based research projects for now. Others are only running animal studies deemed essential and in some cases the only research that continues to move forward is focused on combating COVID-19.

At this point, many institutions are only having discussions about which animals would need to be euthanized if situations deteriorate to levels where this becomes necessary. At some organizations, rodents have been euthanized. The reasons for doing so vary and all are valid. They include:

- Staff shortages
- Too great of a risk of infection for animal care staff.
- The project the animals are involved in cannot be placed on hold and still provide meaningful data.
- A lack of PPE due to shortages during the global pandemic
- The need for animal facilities to donate any available PPE to local health care workers to help save human lives and protect those workers.

**Question: What is AMP's communications planning advice when animals must be euthanized?**

We recognize that many institutions would prefer not to proactively announce the need to euthanize animals. This makes sense for many reasons including the enormity of the human toll of the coronavirus outbreak. However, we would strongly suggest that institutions have information prepared in case they receive media inquiries. It’s possible that staff will be upset or disagree with decisions to euthanize animals. They may decide to share these concerns with others resulting in media calls. Also, animal rights groups have sent out several press releases falsely suggesting that research animals are being euthanized at all biomedical institutions.
Prepare messaging:

- Discuss how messages will be delivered. Often, institutions limit challenging communications like these to a statement. However, AMP suggests considering whether a spokesperson should also be available, at least for select interviews. Here’s why: The decision to euthanize animals is never an easy one. It’s an emotional issue within the facility. It’s also an emotional issue for many members of the public. While written statements can be helpful, they lack the ability to share sincere sentiment. Even when emotions are expressed in writing, they seem less genuine. By providing a spokesperson via phone (for safety reasons) listeners and/or viewers are exposed to the genuine emotion behind these decisions. Often, a veterinarian is the best choice for these interviews if possible.

Question: In addition to basic facts, what else should our messaging include?

- Clearly explain the reasons behind the decision. If there are several, list them all.

- It’s completely acceptable to admit the global pandemic has resulted in the need to make incredibly challenging decisions around the globe. Nobody wants to euthanize research animals involved in critical studies, especially when the results have not yet been realized. It’s OK to explain that the choices were all negative and the institution faced a situation where they had to choose the least harmful and most ethical option.

- Don’t forget to provide critical context. Don’t assume the reporter will reference the human toll of the current pandemic in their story. So be certain to reference it yourself. For example: If the safety of animal care staff is the reason behind the decision to euthanize animals, say it. Explain that these employees have families and people that depend on them as well and that the institution could not continue to justify the increasing risks faced by these staff persons.

- If PPE shortages are behind the decision, clearly explain the dilemma. “We arrived at a point where there were not enough PPE supplies to care for health care workers helping patients and also protect our animal care staff. We had to make a choice and that choice was to try to save human lives. I am certain the vast majority of the public would agree.”

- Even if your institution decides to limit responses to written statements, do not forget to highlight the difficulty of the decision and the sadness felt by staff.

- Consider highlighting the research projects that are being affected. If the projects answer questions that clearly resonate with the public, share this information.
• Sometimes it’s OK to push back. If a questioner portrays the decision to euthanize animals as a tragic loss of life, agree but then remind them of what we are facing on a global scale. It may be helpful to remind them of the predictions that our healthcare system in many regions of the country may be overwhelmed. Again, don’t assume the reporter will always include this context. Do it for them.

• Be prepared to answer questions about why animals were not adopted out or given to animal rights groups. These questions may come up because several groups have issued press releases stating they are willing to accept research animals. Additional guidance on this issue can be found in our public COVID-19 FAQ.

Questions About Employee Well-Being During the COVID-19 Outbreak

Question: I’m worried about my employees and how they are managing the stress and anxiety of the COVID-19 outbreak. Any advice?

This is a question that has been raised by some of the institutions we serve. It’s an important and very real issue.

It’s especially a concern amongst animal care staff, whose work is considered essential. They continue to travel to their workplaces and provide food and water to animals along with daily health checks.

Due to the urgent need for social distancing, many of these employees are working alone or in facilities with minimal staff. It can be lonely, stress-inducing work.

AMP did some research and located several resources that may help. The National Alliance on Mental Illness has tips to help all Americans cope with the added stress. Another good resource is the CDC which offers some helpful suggestions as well.

Additional resources:

Johns Hopkins University: Stressed About COVID-19? Here’s What Can Help
Question: How about my kids? What should I tell them?

Many of us are unsure how much to tell our children about the outbreak. The CDC says COVID-19 linked anxiety can cause a variety of behavioral responses in kids. These include:

- Excessive crying or irritation in younger children.
- Returning to behaviors they have outgrown (for example, toileting accidents or bedwetting.)
- Excessive worry or sadness.
- Unhealthy eating or sleeping habits.
- Irritability and “acting out” behaviors in teens.

Recognize these signs for what they are. The CDC also recommends talking with your child or teen about the COVID-19 outbreak. Answer their questions and share facts about COVID-19 in a way that your child or teen can understand. It also may be a good idea to limit your family’s exposure to news coverage of the event, including social media. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.

Additional tips from the CDC can be found here.

AMP recently published a blog post with additional information on this issue. It can be found here.