

Hazard Alert

Workers in Animal Houses

This hazard alert contains information relevant to all animal house workers at the University of Queensland.

Background

Workers in contact with laboratory animals may have frequent exposures to allergens in the form of dusts, fibres and animal products. In susceptible individuals, this can lead to varying degrees of allergy or asthma. The development of occupational asthma is primarily related to the length of exposure. However, it has been observed that those who have intermittent exposure for short periods of time can develop severe symptoms quite rapidly.

In recent months, several cases of occupational asthma have been diagnosed in animal house workers at the University of Queensland.

Recommendations

As part of the pre-employment process, it is recommended that all workers who are required to work in animal houses have a pre-employment medical. A pre-employment medical will enable persons who have a history of allergy or asthma to be advised of the risks associated with work in animal houses. The aim of the medical examination is to protect the worker from illness. After the initial medical examination, it is recommended that workers health is monitored on a regular basis by the University Health Service.

Comprehensive information on strategies to manage the risks from exposure to animal products and allergens are available in the Guideline for 'Animal houses' at the Occupational Health and Safety Unit web address (<http://www.uq.edu.au/ohs/>). For specific advice on how to adopt this guideline, please contact the University Health

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Service on 56210 or the Occupational Health and Safety on 52365.

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