

# Vertebrate Animal Biosafety Level 3 Criteria

*Biosafety in Microbiological and Biomedical Laboratories (BMBL) 5th Edition*  
*Section V*



## **Animal Biosafety Level 3 (ABSL-3):**

**Animal Biosafety Level 3** involves practices suitable for work with laboratory animals infected with indigenous or exotic agents, agents that present a potential for aerosol transmission and agents causing serious or potentially lethal disease. ABSL-3 builds upon the standard practices, procedures, containment equipment, and facility requirements of ABSL-2.

ABSL-3 laboratory has special engineering and design features.

ABSL-3 requires that 1) access to the animal facility is restricted; 2) personnel must have specific training in animal facility procedures, the handling of infected animals and the manipulation of potentially lethal agents; 3) personnel must be supervised by individuals with adequate knowledge of potential hazards, microbiological agents, animal manipulations and husbandry procedures; and 4) procedures involving the manipulation of infectious materials, or where aerosols or splashes may be created, must be conducted in BSCs or by use of other physical containment equipment

Appropriate personal protective equipment must be utilized to reduce exposure to infectious agents, animals, and contaminated equipment. Employee occupational health programs must be implemented.

The following standard and special safety practices, safety equipment, and facility requirements apply to ABSL-3

### ***A. Standard Microbiological Practices***

1. The animal facility director establishes and enforces policies, procedures, and protocols for institutional policies and emergency situations.

Each institute must assure that worker safety and health concerns are addressed as part of the animal protocol review.

Prior to beginning a study animal protocols must also be reviewed and approved by the IACUC5 and the Institutional Biosafety Committee.

2. A safety manual specific to the animal facility is prepared or adopted in consultation with the animal facility director and appropriate safety professionals.

The safety manual must be available and accessible. Personnel are advised of potential and special hazards, and are required to read and follow instructions on practices and procedures.

Consideration should be given to specific biohazards unique to the animal species and protocol in use.



3. Supervisor must ensure that animal care, laboratory and support personnel receive appropriate training regarding their duties, animal husbandry procedure, potential hazards, manipulations of infectious agents, necessary precautions to prevent hazard or exposures, and hazard/exposure evaluation procedures (physical hazards, splashes, aerosolization, etc.). Personnel must receive annual updates or additional training when procedures or policies change. Records are maintained for all hazard evaluations, employee training sessions and staff attendance.
4. Appropriate medical surveillance program is in place, as determined by risk assessment. The need for an animal allergy prevention program should be considered.

Facility supervisors should ensure that medical staff is informed of potential occupational hazards within the animal facility, to include those associated with research, animal husbandry duties, animal care and manipulations.

Personal health status may impact an individual's susceptibility to infection, ability to receive immunizations or prophylactic interventions. Therefore, all personnel and particularly women of child-bearing age should be provided information regarding immune competence and conditions that may predispose them to infection. Individuals having these conditions should be encouraged to self-identify to the institution's healthcare provider for appropriate counseling and guidance.

Personnel using respirators must be enrolled in an appropriately constituted respiratory protection program.

5. A sign incorporating the universal biohazard symbol must be posted at the entrance to areas where infectious materials and/or animals are housed or are manipulated. The sign must include the animal biosafety level, general occupational health requirements, personal protective equipment requirements, the supervisor's name (or other responsible personnel), telephone number, and required procedures for entering and exiting the animal areas. Identification of specific infectious agents is recommended when more than one agent is being used within an animal room.

Security-sensitive agent information and occupational health requirements should be posted in accordance with the institutional policy.

Advance consideration should be given to emergency and disaster recovery plans, as a contingency for man-made or natural disasters.

6. Access to the animal room is limited to the fewest number of individuals possible. Only those persons required for program or support purposes are authorized to enter the animal facility and the areas where infectious materials and/or animals are housed or are manipulated.

All persons including facility personnel, service workers, and visitors are advised of the potential hazards (natural or research pathogens, allergens, etc) and are instructed on the appropriate safeguards.



7. Protective laboratory coats, gowns, or uniforms are recommended to prevent contamination of personal clothing.

Gloves are worn to prevent skin contact with contaminated, infectious/ and hazardous materials and when handling animals. Double-glove practices should be used when dictated by risk assessment.

Gloves and personal protective equipment should be removed in a manner that minimizes transfer of infectious materials outside of the areas where infectious materials and/or animals are housed or are manipulated.

Persons must wash their hands after removing gloves, and before leaving the areas where infectious materials and/or animals are housed or are manipulated.

Eye and face and respiratory protection should be used in rooms containing infected animals, as dictated by the risk assessment.

8. Eating, drinking, smoking, handling contact lenses, applying cosmetics, and storing food for human use should only be done in designated areas and are not permitted in animal or procedure rooms.
9. All procedures are carefully performed to minimize the creation of aerosols or splatters of infectious materials and waste.
10. Mouth pipetting is prohibited. Mechanical pipetting devices must be used.
11. Policies for the safe handling of sharps, such as needles, scalpels, pipettes, and broken glassware must be developed and implemented.

When applicable, laboratory supervisors should adopt improved engineering and work practice controls that reduce the risk of sharps injuries. Precautions, including those listed below, must always be taken with sharp items. These include:

- a. Needles and syringes or other sharp instruments are limited to use in the animal facility when there is no alternative for such procedures as parenteral injection, blood collection, or aspiration of fluids from laboratory animals and diaphragm bottles.
- b. Disposable needles must not be bent, sheared, broken, recapped, removed from disposable syringes, or otherwise manipulated by hand before disposal. Used disposable needles must be carefully placed in puncture-resistant containers used for sharps disposal. Sharps containers should be located as close to the work site as possible.
- c. Non-disposable sharps must be placed in a hard-walled container for transport to a processing area for decontamination, preferably by autoclaving.
- d. Broken glassware must not be handled directly; it should be removed using a brush and dustpan, tongs, or forceps. Plasticware should be substituted for glassware whenever possible.



- e. Equipment containing sharp edges and corners should be avoided.
12. Equipment and work surfaces are routinely decontaminated with an appropriate disinfectant after work with an infectious agent, and after any spills, splashes, or other overt contamination.
  13. Animals and plants not associated with the work being performed must not be permitted in the areas where infectious materials and/or animals are housed or are manipulated.
  14. An effective integrated pest management program is required. See Appendix G.
  15. All wastes from the animal room (including animal tissues, carcasses, and bedding) are transported from the animal room in leak-proof containers for appropriate disposal in compliance with applicable institutional, local and state requirements.

Decontaminate of all potentially infectious materials before disposal using an effective method.

## ***B. Special Practices***

1. Animal care staff, laboratory and routine support personnel must be provided a medical surveillance program as dictated by the risk assessment, and administered appropriate immunizations for agents handled or potentially present, before entry into animal rooms.

Each institution should consider the need for collection and storage of serum samples from at-risk personnel.

2. All procedures involving the manipulation of infectious materials, handling infected animals or the generations of aerosols must be conducted within BSCs or other physical containment devices when practical.

When a procedure cannot be performed within a biosafety cabinet, a combination of personal protective equipment and other containment devices must be used.

Consideration should be given to the use of restraint devices and practices that reduce the risk of exposure during animal manipulations (e.g., physical restraint devices, chemical restraint medications, etc).

3. The risk of infectious aerosols from infected animals or their bedding also can be reduced if animals are housed in containment caging systems (such as solid wall and bottom cages covered with filter bonnets, open cages placed in inward flow ventilated enclosures, HEPA-filter isolators and caging systems, or other equivalent primary containment systems).
4. Actively ventilated caging systems must be designed to prevent the escape of microorganisms from the cage. Exhaust plenums for these systems should be sealed to prevent escape of microorganisms if the ventilation system becomes static, and the exhaust must be HEPA filtered. Safety mechanisms should be in place that prevent the cages and



exhaust plenums from becoming positive to the surrounding area should the exhaust fan fail. The system should also be alarmed to indicate when operational malfunctions occur.

5. A method for decontaminating all infectious materials must be available within the facility, preferably within the areas where infectious materials and/or animals are housed or are manipulated (e.g. autoclave, chemical disinfection, or other approved decontamination methods).

Consideration should be given to means for decontaminating routine husbandry equipment, sensitive electronic and medical equipment.

Decontaminate all potential infectious materials (including animal tissues, carcasses, contaminated bedding, unused feed, sharps, and other refuse) before removal from the areas where infectious materials and/or animals are housed or are manipulated by an appropriate method.

It is recommended that animal bedding and waste be decontaminated prior to manipulation and before removal from the areas where infectious materials and/or animals are housed or are manipulated, preferably within the caging system.

Develop and implement an appropriate waste disposal program in compliance with applicable institutional, local and state requirements. Autoclaving of content prior to incineration is recommended.

6. Equipment, cages, and racks should be handled in manner that minimizes contamination of other areas.

Equipment must be decontaminated before repair, maintenance, or removal from the areas where infectious materials and/or animals are housed or are manipulated.

Spills involving infectious materials must be contained, decontaminated, and cleaned up by staff properly trained and equipped to work with infectious material.

7. Incidents that may result in exposure to infectious materials must be immediately evaluated and treated according to procedures described in the safety manual. All such incidents must be reported to the animal facility supervisor or personnel designated by the institution. Medical evaluation, surveillance, and treatment should be provided as appropriate and records maintained.

### **C. Safety Equipment (Primary Barriers and Personal Protective Equipment)**

1. Properly maintained BSCs, and other physical containment devices or equipment, should be used for all manipulations for infectious materials and when possible, animals. These manipulations include necropsy, harvesting of tissues or fluids from infected animals or eggs, and intranasal inoculation of animals.

The risk of infectious aerosols from infected animals or bedding can be reduced through the use of primary barrier systems. These systems may include solid wall and bottom cages



covered with filter bonnets; ventilated cage rack systems; or for larger cages placed in inward flow ventilated enclosures or other equivalent systems or devices.

2. A risk assessment should determine the appropriate type of personal protective equipment to be utilized.

Protective clothing such as uniforms or scrub suits is worn by personnel within the animal facility. Reusable clothing is appropriately contained and decontaminated before being laundered. Laboratory and protective clothing should never be taken home. Disposable personal protective equipment such as non-woven olefin cover-all suits, wrap-around or solid-front gowns should be worn over this clothing, before entering the areas where infectious materials and/or animals are housed or manipulated. Front-button laboratory coats are unsuitable.

Disposable personal protective equipment must be removed when leaving the areas where infectious materials and/or animals are housed or are manipulated. Scrub suits and uniforms are removed before leaving the animal facility.

Disposable personal protective equipment and other contaminated waste are appropriately contained and decontaminated prior to disposal.

3. Appropriate eye, face and respiratory protection are worn by all personnel entering areas where infectious materials and/or animals are housed or are manipulated. To prevent cross contamination boots, shoe covers, or other protective footwear, are used where indicated.

Eye and face protection must be disposed of with other contaminated laboratory waste or decontaminated before reuse. Persons who wear contact lenses should also wear eye protection when entering areas with potentially high concentrations or airborne particulates.

4. Gloves are worn to protect hands from exposure to hazardous materials.

A risk assessment should be performed to identify the appropriate glove for the task and alternatives to latex gloves should be available.

Procedures may require the use of wearing two pairs of gloves (double-glove).

Gloves are changed when contaminated, integrity has been compromised, or when otherwise necessary.

Gloves must not be worn outside the animal rooms.

Gloves and personal protective equipment should be removed in a manner that prohibits transfer of infectious materials.

Do not wash or reuse disposable gloves. Dispose of used gloves with other contaminated waste.



Persons must wash their hands after handling animals and before leaving the areas where infectious materials and/or animals are housed or are manipulated. Hand washing should occur after the removal of gloves.

#### ***D. Laboratory Facilities (Secondary Barriers)***

1. The animal facility is separated from areas that are open to unrestricted personnel traffic within the building. External facility doors are self-closing and self-locking.

Access to the animal facility is restricted.

Doors to areas where infectious materials and/or animals are housed, open inward, are self-closing, are kept closed when experimental animals are present, and should never be propped open. Doors to cubicles inside an animal room may open outward or slide horizontally or vertically.

Entry into the containment area is via a double-door entry which constitutes an anteroom/airlock and a change room. Showers may be considered based on risk assessment. An additional double-door access anteroom or double-doored autoclave may be provided for movement of supplies and wastes into and out of the facility.

2. A hand washing sink is located at the exit of the areas where infectious materials and/or animals are housed or are manipulated. Additional sinks for hand washing should be located in other appropriate locations within the facility. The sink should be hands-free or automatically operated.

If the animal facility has multiple segregated areas where infectious materials and/or animals are housed or are manipulated, a sink must also be available for hand washing at the exit from each segregated area.

Sink traps are filled with water, and/or appropriate liquid to prevent the migration of vermin and gases.

3. The animal facility is designed, constructed, and maintained to facilitate cleaning, decontamination and housekeeping. The interior surfaces (walls, floors and ceilings) are water resistant.

Penetrations in floors, walls and ceiling surfaces are sealed, to include openings around ducts, doors and door frames, to facilitate pest control, proper cleaning and decontamination. Walls, floors and ceilings should form a sealed and sanitizable surface.

Floors must be slip resistant, impervious to liquids, and resistant to chemicals. Flooring is seamless, sealed resilient or poured floors, with integral cove bases.

Decontamination of an entire animal room should be considered when there has been gross contamination of the space, significant changes in usage, for major renovations, or maintenance shut downs. Selection of the appropriate materials and methods used to decontaminate the animal room must be based on the risk assessment.



4. Cabinets and bench tops must be impervious to water and resistant to heat, organic solvents, acids, alkalis, and other chemicals. Spaces between benches, cabinets, and equipment should be accessible for cleaning.

Furniture should be minimized. Chairs used in animal area must be covered with a non-porous material that can be easily cleaned and decontaminated. Furniture must be capable of supporting anticipated loads and uses. Sharp edges and corners should be avoided.

5. External windows are not recommended; if present, all windows must be sealed and must be resistant to breakage. The presence of windows may impact facility security and therefore should be assessed by security personnel.
6. Ventilation to the facility should be provided in accordance with the *Guide for Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*.<sup>1</sup> The direction of airflow into the animal facility is inward; animal rooms should maintain inward directional airflow compared to adjoining hallways. A ducted exhaust air ventilation system is provided. Exhaust air is discharged to the outside without being recirculated to other rooms.

This system creates directional airflow which draws air into the animal room from "clean" areas and toward "contaminated" areas.

Ventilation system design should consider the heat and high moisture load produced during the cleaning of animal rooms and the cage wash process. Filtration and other treatments of the exhaust air may not be required, but should be considered based on site requirements, specific agent manipulations and use conditions. The exhaust must be dispersed away from occupied areas and air intakes, or the exhaust must be HEPA-filtered.

Personnel must verify that the direction of the airflow (into the animal areas) is proper. It is recommended that a visual monitoring device that indicates directional inward airflow be provided at the animal room entry. The ABSL-3 animal facility shall be designed such that under failure conditions the airflow will not be reversed. Audible alarms should be considered to notify personnel of ventilation and HVAC system failure.

7. Internal facility appurtenances, such as light fixtures, air ducts, and utility pipes, are arranged to minimize horizontal surface areas, to facilitate cleaning and minimize the accumulation of debris or fomites.
8. Floor drains must be maintained and filled with water, and/or appropriate disinfectant to prevent the migration of vermin and gases.
9. Cages are washed in a mechanical cage washer. The mechanical cage washer has a final rinse temperature of at least 180°F. Cages should be autoclaved or otherwise decontaminated prior to removal from ABSL-3 space. The cage wash facility should be designed and constructed to accommodate high pressure spray systems, humidity, strong chemical disinfectants and 180°F water temperatures, during the cage cleaning process.
10. Illumination is adequate for all activities, avoiding reflections and glare that could impede vision.





11. BSCs (Class II, Class III) must be installed so that fluctuations of the room air supply and exhaust do not interfere with its proper operations. Class II BSCs should be located away from doors, heavily traveled laboratory areas, and other possible airflow disruptions.

HEPA filtered exhaust air from a Class II BSC can be safely re-circulated back into the laboratory environment if the cabinet is tested and certified at least annually and operated according to manufacturer's recommendations. BSCs can also be connected to the laboratory exhaust system by either a thimble (canopy) connection or a direct (hard) connection. Provisions to assure proper safety cabinet performance and air system operation must be verified. BSCs should be certified at least annually to assure correct performance.

Class III BSCs must supply air in such a manner that prevents positive pressurization of the cabinet or the laboratory room.

All BSCs should be used according to manufacturers' recommendations.

When applicable, equipment that may produce infectious aerosols must be contained in devices that exhaust air through HEPA filtration or other equivalent technology before being discharged into the animal facility. These HEPA filters should be tested and/or replaced at least annually.

12. An autoclave is available which is convenient to the animal rooms where the biohazard is contained. The autoclave is utilized to decontaminate infectious materials and waste before moving it to the other areas of the facility. If not convenient to areas where infectious materials and/or animals are housed or are manipulated, special practices should be developed for transport of infectious materials designated alternate location/s within the facility.
13. Vacuum lines must be protected with HEPA filters, or their equivalent. Filters must be replaced as needed. Liquid disinfectant traps may be required.
14. Emergency eyewash and shower are readily available; location is determined by risk assessment.
15. The ABSL-3 facility design and operational procedures must be documented. The facility must be tested to verify that the design and operational parameters have been met prior to use. Facilities should be re-verified at least annually against these procedures as modified by operational experience.
16. Additional environmental protection (e.g., personnel showers, HEPA filtration of exhaust air, containment of other piped services, and the provision of effluent decontamination) should be considered if recommended by the agent summary statement, as determined by risk assessment of the site conditions, or other applicable federal, state or local regulations.

