

**Biosafety Level 3 – Animals (BL3-N)**  
***NIH Guidelines for Research Involving Recombinant or  
Synthetic Nucleic Acid Molecules  
(Appendix M-II-C) – April 2024***



**Biosafety Level 3 - Animals (BL3-N)**

Personnel who handle pathogenic and potentially lethal agents shall be required to have specific training and be supervised by knowledgeable scientists who are experienced in working with these agents. BL3-N containment also minimizes escape of recombinant or synthetic nucleic acid molecule-containing organisms from exhaust air or waste material from the containment area.

**Appendix M-II-C-1. Standard Practices (BL3-N)**

**a. Animal Facility Access (BL3-N)**

- 1) The containment area shall be locked.
- 2) The containment area shall be patrolled or monitored at frequent intervals.
- 3) The containment building shall be controlled and have a locking access.
- 4) The Animal Facility Director shall establish policies and procedures whereby only persons who have been advised of the potential hazard and who meet any specific entry requirements (e.g., vaccination) shall enter the laboratory or animal rooms.
- 5) Animal room doors, gates, or other closures shall be kept closed when experiments are in progress.

**b. Decontamination and Inactivation (BL3-N)**

- 1) The work surfaces of containment equipment shall be decontaminated when work with organisms containing recombinant or synthetic nucleic acid molecules is finished. Where feasible, plastic-backed paper toweling shall be used on nonporous work surfaces to facilitate clean-up.
- 2) All animals shall be euthanized at the end of their experimental usefulness and the carcasses decontaminated before disposal in an approved manner.
- 3) Needles and syringes shall be promptly placed in a puncture-resistant container and decontaminated, preferably by autoclaving, before discard or reuse.
- 4) Special safety testing, decontamination procedures, and Institutional Biosafety Committee approval shall be required to transfer agents or tissue/organ specimens from a BL3-N animal facility to a facility with a lower containment classification.

- 5) Liquid effluent from containment equipment, sinks, biological safety cabinets, animal rooms, primary barriers, floor drains, and sterilizers shall be decontaminated by heat treatment before being released into the sanitary system. The procedure used for heat decontamination of liquid wastes shall be monitored with a recording thermometer. The effectiveness of the heat decontamination process system shall be revalidated at minimum on a yearly basis with an indicator organism. More frequent validation, based on the amount of use or other safety factors, shall be left to the discretion of the IBC.

**c. Signs (BL3-N)**

- 1) When the animal research requires special provisions for entry (e.g., vaccination), a warning sign incorporating the universal biosafety symbol shall be posted on all access doors to the animal work area. The sign shall indicate: (i) the agent, (ii) the animal species, (iii) the name and telephone number of the Animal Facility Director or other responsible individual, and (iv) any special requirements for entering the laboratory.

**d. Protective Clothing (BL3-N)**

- 1) Full protective clothing that protects the individual (e.g., scrub suits, coveralls, uniforms) shall be worn in the animal area. Clothing shall not be worn outside the animal containment area and shall be decontaminated before laundering or disposal. Personnel shall be required to shower before exiting the BL3-N area and wearing of personal clothing.
- 2) Special care shall be taken to avoid skin contamination with microorganisms containing recombinant or synthetic nucleic acid molecules. Impervious and/or protective gloves shall be worn when handling experimental animals and when skin contact with an infectious agent is unavoidable.
- 3) Appropriate respiratory protection shall be worn in rooms containing experimental animals.

**e. Records (BL3-N)**

- 1) Documents regarding experimental animal use and disposal shall be maintained in a permanent record book.
- 2) Any incident involving spills and accidents that result in environmental release or exposure of animals or laboratory workers to organisms containing recombinant or synthetic nucleic acid molecules shall be reported immediately to the Biological Safety Office, Animal Facility Director, Institutional Biosafety Committee, NIH OSP, and other appropriate authorities (if applicable). Reports to the NIH OSP shall be sent to the Office of Science Policy, National Institutes of Health, preferably by e-mail to: [NIHGuidelines@od.nih.gov](mailto:NIHGuidelines@od.nih.gov) (Contact information: 6705 Rockledge Drive, Suite 750, MSC 7985, Bethesda, MD 20892-7985 (20817 for non-USPS mail), 301-496-9838, 301-496-9839 (fax)). Contact information is also available on the OSP website ([www.osp.od.nih.gov](http://www.osp.od.nih.gov)). Medical evaluation, surveillance, and treatment shall be provided as appropriate and written records maintained. If

necessary, the area shall be appropriately decontaminated.

- 3) When appropriate and giving consideration to the agent handled, baseline serum samples shall be collected and stored for animal care and other at-risk personnel. Additional serum specimens may be collected periodically depending on the agent handled or the function of the facility.

**f. Transfer of Materials (BL3-N)**

- 1) Biological materials removed from the animal containment laboratory in a viable or intact state shall be transferred to a non-breakable sealed primary container and then enclosed in a non-breakable sealed secondary container. All containers, primary and secondary, shall be disinfected before removal from the animal facility. Advance approval for transfer of material shall be obtained from the Animal Facility Director. Packages containing viable agents may be opened only in a facility having an equivalent or higher level of physical containment unless the agent is biologically inactivated or incapable of reproduction.
- 2) Special safety testing, decontamination procedures, and Institutional Biosafety Committee approval shall be required to transfer agents or tissue/organ specimens from a BL3-N animal facility to a facility with a lower containment classification.

**g. Other (BL3-N)**

- 1) All genetically engineered neonates shall be permanently marked within 72 hours after birth, if their size permits. If their size does not permit marking, their containers should be marked. In addition, transgenic animals should contain distinct and biochemically assayable DNA sequences that allow identification of transgenic animals from among non-transgenic animals.
- 2) Appropriate steps should be taken to prevent horizontal transmission or exposure of laboratory personnel. If the agent used as the vector is known to be transmitted by a particular route (e.g., arthropods), special attention should be given to preventing spread by that route. In the absence of specific knowledge of a particular route of transmission, all potential means of horizontal transmission (e.g., arthropods, contaminated bedding, or animal waste) should be prevented.
- 3) Eating, drinking, smoking, and applying cosmetics shall not be permitted in the work area.
- 4) Individuals who handle materials and animals containing recombinant or synthetic nucleic acid molecules shall be required to wash their hands before exiting the containment area.
- 5) Experiments involving other organisms that require containment levels lower than BL3-N may be conducted in the same area concurrently with experiments requiring BL3-N containment provided that they are conducted in accordance with BL3-N practices.
- 6) Animal holding areas shall be cleaned at least once a day and decontaminated immediately following any spill of viable materials.

- 7) All procedures shall be performed carefully to minimize the creation of aerosols.
- 8) A double barrier shall be provided to separate male and female animals unless reproductive studies are part of the experiment or other measures are taken to avoid reproductive transmission. Reproductive incapacitation may be used.
- 9) The containment area shall be in accordance with state and Federal laws and animal care requirements.
- 10) All animals shall be euthanized at the end of their experimental usefulness and the carcasses decontaminated before disposal in an approved manner.
- 11) Personnel shall be required to shower before exiting the BL3-N area and wearing personal clothing.
- 12) Animals of the same or different species, which are not involved in the work being performed, shall not be permitted in the animal area.
- 13) Needles and syringes shall be used only for parenteral injection and aspiration of fluids from laboratory animals and diaphragm bottles. Only needle-locking syringes or disposable syringe-needle units (i.e., needle is integral to the syringe) shall be used for the injection or aspiration of fluids containing organisms that contain recombinant or synthetic nucleic acid molecules. Extreme caution shall be used when handling needles and syringes to avoid autoinoculation and the generation of aerosols during use and disposal. Following use, needles shall not be bent, sheared, replaced in the needle sheath or guard or removed from the syringe. The needles and syringes shall be promptly placed in a puncture-resistant container and decontaminated, preferably by autoclaving, before discard or reuse.
- 14) A biosafety manual shall be prepared or adopted. Personnel shall be advised of special hazards and required to read and follow instructions on practices and procedures.

#### **Appendix M-II-C-2. Animal Facilities (BL3-N)**

- a. Animals shall be contained within an enclosed structure (animal room or equivalent) to minimize the possibility of theft or unintentional release and avoid arthropod access. The special provision to avoid the entry or escape of arthropods from the animal areas may be waived if the agent in use is not known to be transmitted by arthropods.
- b. The interior walls, floors, and ceilings shall be impervious to water and resistant to acids, alkalis, organic solvents, and moderate heat, to facilitate cleaning. Penetrations in these structures and surfaces (e.g., plumbing and utilities) shall be sealed.
- c. Windows in the animal facility shall be closed, sealed, and breakage resistant (e.g., double-pane tempered glass or equivalent). The need to maintain negative pressure should be considered when constructing or renovating the animal facility.
- d. An autoclave, incinerator, or other effective means to decontaminate animals and waste shall be available, preferably within the containment area. If feasible, a double-

door autoclave is preferred and should be positioned to allow removal of material from the containment area.

- e. If arthropods are used in the experiment or the agent under study can be transmitted by an arthropod, the interior work area shall be appropriately screened (52 mesh). All perimeter joints and openings shall be sealed, and additional arthropod control mechanisms used to minimize arthropod entry and propagation, including appropriate screening, or the equivalent of access doors.
- f. Access doors to the containment area shall be self-closing.
- g. The animal area shall be separated from all other areas. Passage through two sets of doors shall be the basic requirement for entry into the animal area from access corridors or other contiguous areas. The animal containment area shall be physically separated from access corridors and other laboratories or areas by a double-door clothes change room, equipped with integral showers and airlock.
- h. Liquid effluent from containment equipment, sinks, biological safety cabinets, animal rooms, primary barriers, floor drains, and sterilizers shall be decontaminated by heat treatment before being released into the sanitary system. The procedure used for heat decontamination of liquid wastes shall be monitored with a recording thermometer. The effectiveness of the heat decontamination process system shall be revalidated at minimum on a yearly basis with an indicator organism. More frequent validation, based on the amount of use or other safety factors, shall be left to the discretion of the IBC.
- i. An exhaust air ventilation system shall be provided. This system shall create directional airflow that draws air into the animal room through the entry area. The building exhaust, or the exhaust from primary containment units, may be used for this purpose if the exhaust air is discharged to the outside and shall be dispersed away from occupied areas and air intakes. Personnel shall verify that the direction of the airflow (into the animal room) is proper.
- j. If the agent is transmitted by aerosol, then the exhaust air shall pass through a high efficiency particulate air/HEPA filter.
- k. Vacuum lines shall be protected with high efficiency particulate air/HEPA filters and liquid disinfectant traps.
- l. In lieu of open housing in the special animal room, animals held in a BL3-N area may be housed in partial-containment caging systems (e.g., Horsfall units or gnotobiotic systems, or other special containment primary barriers). Prudent judgment must be exercised to implement this ventilation system (e.g., animal species) and its discharge location.
- m. Each animal area shall contain a foot, elbow, or automatically operated sink for hand washing. The sink shall be located near the exit door.
- n. Restraining devices for animals may be required to avoid damage to the integrity of the animal containment facility.