

# THE **SAFE** ZONE

## ALLERGY to LAB ANIMALS (ALA)

Allergy to lab animals is an important health concern for those who work with animals. A mild allergy can make your professional life unpleasant. A more serious allergy can force you out of your chosen line of work. An extremely serious and fortunately rare allergic response can be life threatening.

### WHAT IS ALA?

An abnormally severe response to animal proteins. Symptoms include any of:

- : rhinoconjunctivitis - red and itchy eyes - the most common symptom
- : skin reactions - wheals in areas of animal contact or extensive rashes
- : watery nasal discharge
- : asthma
- : anaphalaxis - rare but potentially fatal

Symptoms can grow progressively worsen over time.



### WHO IS AT RISK OF DEVELOPING ALA?

Anyone who works with laboratory animals. At particular risk are:

- : those who suffer from other allergies and for whom ALA symptoms may be unusually severe.
- : smokers.

But ALA can strike others as well.

- : Between 15 and 35% of people who work with laboratory animals develop ALA.
- : Half of those who develop ALA do so within the first two years of working with laboratory animals.

### WHAT CAUSES ALA?

Direct skin contact or inhalation of animal proteins including dander, fecal material and the proteins in animal tissue, serum or urine. An allergic response can be triggered by:

- : handling an animal
- : entering a room where there is airborne
  - animal dander or
  - bedding contaminated with animal excrement

# THE **SAFE** ZONE Continued ...

## PROTECTING YOURSELF FROM ALA

By taking precautions you can reduce the chances that:

- : you will develop ALA at all
- : your mild allergy will worsen and
- : you will suffer an serious allergic attack

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. See your physician if you believe you may have ALA.
2. Reduce exposure by minimizing the time spent near animals.
3. Do animal manipulations in a fume hood or safety cabinet if possible.
4. Wash hands frequently and consider showering immediately after working with lab animals.
5. Avoid touching your face or your eyes with contaminated hands or gloves.
6. Always use protective equipment when working with animals or animal tissues.

### GLOVES

Animal allergens on the hands can cause skin reactions.

### RESPIRATOR

Use a respirator designed to protect you from inhaled particulates not a surgical mask which is intended to protect the patient.

### LAB COAT or SURGICAL GOWN

Protective clothing should have elastic wristbands to protect the forearms from allergens. If possible change into dedicated protective clothing before beginning work with animals and then remove it immediately after work is completed. Be careful not to transfer allergens from your protective clothing to your street clothes.

### DUST or SURGEON'S CAP

Wear a head covering to keep allergens from adhering to your hair.

### SHOE COVERS

Wear shoe covers in animal rooms to avoid tracking animal allergens into clean areas.