GUIDANCE ON EXCEPTIONS REGARDING HOUSING OR
HUSBANDRY OF LABORATORY ANIMALS

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Background

The Animal Welfare Regulations require laboratory rodents be housed and managed
according to standards outlined in the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory
Animals* (*Guide*). The *Guide* lists specific standards for cage size requirements, cage
change frequency and physical separation of species. This guideline outlines
institutionally accepted housing and husbandry exceptions to the *Guide* for mice and
rats.¹

For information on housing and husbandry of breeding mice, please see the ACUC
Overcrowded Mouse Cage Guidelines.

Common, Institutionally Accepted Exceptions to the *Guide*

Rodent Cages

1. Cage change schedules
   a. *Guide* recommendations – Cage change intervals of one week for rodents
      housed in solid bottom cages with the caveat that “some types of caging
      might require less frequent cleaning or disinfection; such housing may
      include…ventilated caging” (Chapter 3; page 70).
   b. OLAC changes bedding in individually ventilated cages at least once
ten every three weeks. As is standard practice with conventional cages, daily
spot-checking will occur; cages that are exceptionally dirty – as may occur
with breeding cages or a water bottle/pack leak – will be changed
immediately.
2. Cage top sanitation schedules
   a. *Guide* recommendations – “In general, enclosures and accessories, such
as tops should be sanitized every two weeks” (Chapter 3; page 70).

¹ NOTE: The Office for Laboratory Animal care (OLAC) routinely accepts the exceptions outlined in this guidance
document. Requests for housing and husbandry exceptions absent from this document or for other non-*Mus* or
*Rattus* rodents must be described in the Principal Investigator’s Animal Use Protocol and approved by the ACUC.
b. OLAC rodent cage lids and food hoppers are changed during every other
cage change or every two weeks. Using every other cage-change interval,
cage tops and lids may be changed every 6 weeks. Cage lids and food
hoppers contained a similar number of bacterial colonies after 2 weeks of
use compared to 120 days. Bi-weekly sanitation of laboratory rodent cage
lids and wire-bar food hoppers is therefore not justified, according to the
authors (Schondelmayer et al., 2006).

3. If, at any time, OLAC or the investigators have evidence that any of the
exceptions to the Guide outlined above negatively impact animal health or
welfare, concerns should be reported to ACUC. Modifications to this guideline
may be made to reflect those concerns.

Physical Separation of Animals by Species

1. Guide recommendations – Physical separation of animals by species (Chapter 4;
pages 111-2).

2. Different species are usually housed in separate rooms; however, OLAC
veterinarians may determine that behaviorally compatible animals with a similar
pathogen status can be housed in the same room, but in separate cages or
ventilated racks.

References

- Institute of Laboratory Animal Research (ILAR) (2011). Guide for the Care and
Press.

Housing Laboratory Rats and Mice in the Same Room Does Not Affect the
Growth or Reproduction of Either Species. Journal of the American Association
of Laboratory Animal Science, 48(5), 492-98.

- Schondelmeyer, C.W., Dillehay, D.A.L., Webb, S.K., Huerkamp, M.J., Mook,
rodent caging accessories: Evidence supporting less frequent cleaning. Journal
of the American Association of Laboratory Animal Science, 45(5), 40-3.