

University of Louisville
Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee
Policies and Procedures

Social Housing of Animals

Policy: Species that are social in nature will be housed in pairs or groups. Exceptions to social housing are granted for: a) study requirements as approved in the IACUC *Proposal*, b) veterinary care as approved by the Attending Veterinarian or designate, or c) social incompatibility.

Rationale: The *Guide* states that single housing of social species should be the exception. Social housing is considered by the Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care International (AAALAC) as the default method of housing unless otherwise justified based on social incompatibility resulting from inappropriate behavior, veterinary concerns regarding animal well-being, or scientific necessity approved by the IACUC.

Procedures, Guidelines, and Exceptions:

1. Exceptions due to research objectives
 - a. If animals need to be housed singly due to scientific necessity, a justification for the necessity must be included in the IACUC *Proposal* and approved by the IACUC.
 - b. Single housing of social animals is acceptable when secondary to attrition of animals. Specific IACUC approval is not necessary, but this situation should be avoided by simultaneous euthanasia of groups of animals whenever possible. Similarly, acquisition of individual animals should be avoided, but does not require specific IACUC approval for individual housing.
2. Veterinary care-based exceptions
 - a. Exemptions from social housing may be granted by a Comparative Medicine Research Unit (CMRU) veterinarian if deemed in the animal's best interest (clinical health issues, general body condition, *etc.*). The exemption should be documented in the individual animal health record, colony records, or a cage-mounted instruction card and reviewed periodically (at least every 30 days for non-rodent mammals).
 - b. Individual housing for up to 7 days or skin suture/staple removal, whichever is greater, following surgical manipulation does not require IACUC approval or veterinary exemption. Retention of skin sutures/staples or individual housing beyond 14 days requires specific IACUC approval or a CMRU veterinarian exemption.
3. Social or behavioral incompatibility
 - a. Risks of social incompatibility are reduced by group housing of animals at a young age and when first introduced to the vivarium. This should be performed whenever possible. Development of a stable social hierarchy may entail some antagonistic interactions, particularly when adult animals are initially introduced to each other. This is normal for some species and should be expected. Animals may have to be introduced to each other slowly, and over a period of time and should be monitored closely to ensure compatibility.
 - b. Socially housed larger species should be provided with a sufficient number of feeders to ensure each animal has the opportunity to consume sufficient feed. In some cases (*e.g.*, swine, cattle),

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separation during feeding is acceptable with return to social housing as soon as feeding is completed.

- c. Rodents in active breeding colonies may require temporary or permanent isolation. Pair housing in stable pairs is preferred. However, isolation of aggressive males, peri-parturient females, or single animals of a given gender in a litter is acceptable without specific IACUC approval.
- d. Every attempt should be made to socially house rabbits and tree shrews. Male rabbits and tree shrews that have reached breeding age and/or were housed individually prior to arriving at UofL may be exempted by a CMRU veterinarian. The exemption should be documented in the individual animal health record, colony records, or a cage-mounted instruction card.
- e. For other instances of social or behavioral incompatibility, a CMRU veterinarian should be consulted prior to the single housing unless immediate danger to animal health is suspected. In such cases, animals may be separated and a veterinarian consulted as soon as feasible. Veterinarian exemption must be documented in the individual animal record, colony records, or a cage-mounted instruction card. Attempts should be made to establish social housing with another animal or group of animals.

4. Individual housing

- a. When deemed necessary, single housing of social animals should be limited to the minimum period necessary and, where possible, afforded other means of an enhanced social experience, including visual, auditory, olfactory and, depending on the species, protected tactile contact with compatible conspecifics or periodic release into larger enclosures.
- b. In some cases, intermittent or temporary individual housing may be considered in the best interest of the animals. For example, cats may be released into the secondary enclosure for several hours daily and returned to individual cages at night to ensure that each animal has the opportunity for solitude and feeding without interference from other animals. Such conditions should be described in either an IACUC-approved *Proposal* or CMRU-approved husbandry SOP.
- c. Unless contraindicated by veterinary care orders or study design, animal housed individually should be provided environmental enrichment greater than that provided to socially-housed animals. This may include additional attention by animal care staff if species-appropriate.

References:

1. Institute of Laboratory Animal Resources, National Research Council. 2011. The Guide for Care and Use of Laboratory Animals. National Academy Press, Washington, DC, p. 64.
2. Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care International (AAALAC) Position Statement, “Social Housing” (<http://www.aaalac.org/accreditation/positionstatements.cfm#social>).
3. AAALAC FAQ, “Social Housing and Social Experience” (http://www.aaalac.org/accreditation/faq_landing.cfm#C6).

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