IMMUNOSUPPRESSION AND WORKING WITH ANIMALS

Many common laboratory animals, especially rodents, may harbor infectious organisms that cause innaparrent or asymptomatic infections in those animals. This means that they do not show outward signs of disease. Some of these potential disease-causing organisms are not considered a hazard to personnel with a fully functional immune system. However, some are opportunistic in nature, and can cause severe disease conditions in individuals who are immunosuppressed (improperly functioning immune system).

Immunosuppression can be caused by a variety of things. Chemotherapy or radiation treatments for cancer or organ transplant patients, splenectomy, auto-immune diseases such as systemic lupus, cortico-steroid therapy, diabetes, chronic viral diseases such as Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C, and infection with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) are some noteworthy examples. It is important to recognize that there may be a significantly increased risk in working with animals in the laboratory for a person with an imperfectly functioning immune system.

If you work with laboratory animals in research or teaching and you are, or become immunosuppressed, it is critical that you inform your supervisor, and seek the advice of a physician immediately. You may have a significantly increased risk for an occupationally acquired illness.

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