

Weaning Rats and Mice

307.1 Policy Purpose

This policy describes the procedures for weaning rats and mice. It applies to all researchers who maintain breeding colonies at Emory. The purpose of the policy is to minimize adverse events associated with housing newly weaned animals.

307.2 Training Requirements

Hands-on training is required for all personnel who breed and wean their own mice or rats. Training is available through the Division of Animal Resources (DAR) at both the Yerkes National Primate Center and the Emory University main campus.

307.3 Delineation of Responsibilities

It is expected that both laboratory and DAR staff will provide appropriate care to all research animals on an ongoing basis. However, in situations where laboratory staff are breeding and weaning mice and rats, the laboratory is responsible for correctly setting up weanlings in new cages as described below. Once these animals are weaned, primary responsibility for their daily care shifts to the DAR animal care staff. However, as is the case in general, laboratory personnel are responsible for reporting to DAR any animal care issues that they observe as they are conducting other procedures with the research animals.

307.4 Weanling Cage Set Up

307.4.1 Cages

307.4.1.1 To prevent overcrowding, mouse litters are to be weaned between 19 and 24 days postpartum. Exceptions are allowed, as indicated under the Special Circumstances section below. Regardless, it is the responsibility of the investigator to adhere to maximum cage density policies (*see*: http://www.iacuc.emory.edu/documents/mouse_overcrowded_cage.pdf).

307.4.1.2 All weanling animals must be placed in a clean, standard rodent cage with food and water.

307.4.4 Water

307.4.2.1 Regardless of caging system (static or automatic water), a fresh water bottle must be provided.

307.4.2.2 If animals are placed on an automatic water rack, the valve should be primed before placing in the cage. A drop of water on the valve will help the animals learn to use the Lixit®.

307.4.3 Food

307.4.3.1 The food hoppers must be filled with chow appropriate for the particular strain.

307.4.3.2 A portion cup must be placed in the bottom of the cage containing moistened rodent chow. The “mush cup” should be prepared by adding an excess of water to a few food pellets so that they become softened for easy consumption.

307.4.4 Verification by laboratory and animal care personnel

- 307.4.4.1** Once the weaning cage is set up, the laboratory member must initial and date a “Newly Weaned” card and insert it with the standard cage card such that it is visible to animal care staff. These cards are provided by DAR (see Appendix A).
- 307.4.4.2** By 5:00 pm of the day following initial set-up, a laboratory member must re-verify that the cage has been set up correctly and that the animals appear healthy. The card must be initialed and dated for a second time by a laboratory member.
- 307.4.4.3** By 5:00 pm on the day following initial set-up, animal care staff must independently verify that the weaning cage is set up correctly and that the animals appear healthy. If this is the case, then they initial and date the weaning card.
- 307.4.4.4** If the animal care staff find that the cage has not been set up properly, they will correct the deficiencies upon discovery and initial and date the weaning card. They will then contact the lab and document the corrective care. Charges will apply for this additional care.

307.4.5 Subsequent Care

- 307.4.5.1** Post-weaning, animal care staff will monitor the animals on a daily basis.
- 307.4.5.2** Newly Weaned cards will be removed at the discretion of animal care staff (typically at time of water bottle removal).
- 307.4.5.3** For animals housed on autowater racks, water bottles will remain in cages a minimum of two weeks. Animal care staff will remove bottles once they determine that bottle water is no longer being consumed.
- 307.4.5.4** Requests from laboratories for extended water bottle use will be reviewed by veterinary personnel. Extended use, while necessary for some strains, will result in additional charges (see “Special Circumstances” below).

307.5 Special Circumstances

The procedures indicated above are the baseline standard for weaning of normal, healthy mouse and rat strains/lines. However, it is understood that not all strains/lines fall within this category; some are more fragile. In these circumstances it is considered best practice for the laboratory staff to work with veterinarian and animal care personnel to develop specific programs of care for these strains. In these instances, the standard of care must be detailed in the IACUC protocol; this may entail amendment of the approved protocol. Charges may apply if additional care is required. Issues to consider when developing a standard of care for a fragile strain/line include but are not limited to the following:

- Age of weaning past 24 days of age
- Length of provision of water bottle past standard of care
- Addition of supplemental food/water sources such as hydration or nutrient gels
- Other considerations

307.6 Document Properties

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Appendix A: Newly Weaned Cage Card:

NEWLY WEANED (Initial and date in the boxes)	Lab certify setup	
	Lab follow up check	
	DAR check	