

Guidelines for Social Housing of Social Species

Background

The *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals* states, “Appropriate social interactions among members of the same species (conspecifics) are essential to normal development and wellbeing. Single housing of social species should be the exception and justified based on experimental requirements or veterinary-related concerns about animal well-being.”¹

Standard

In the NIH Intramural Research Program, social housing is the default housing method for social animals.

Each IC housing social animals must develop a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) or policy describing social housing procedures and documentation of social animals that are singly housed.

Exceptions

Exceptions to the standard because of experimental requirements must be justified in the Animal Study Proposal (ASP), approved by the Institute/Center Animal Care and Use Committee (IC ACUC), and “limited to the minimum period necessary, and where possible, provide visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile contact...with compatible conspecifics”². The justification should also include whether there are intermittent periods in the study when social housing may be attempted (e.g., prior to study initiation or after study completion). ASP justifications for singly housing nonhuman primates due to experimental requirements should address the four factors listed in [Appendix 2: Behavior Management of Nonhuman Primates](#) (12/09/2020). These justifications must be reviewed by the ACUC not less than annually.⁷

Intermittent social housing may also be necessary due to breeding strategies, study attrition, or genotyping methods, and may vary depending on the species.

Additionally, social animals may be singly housed at the discretion of the veterinarian due to welfare concerns (e.g., incompatibility, behavioral concerns, or medical conditions). Veterinary-related welfare concerns are handled on a case-by-case basis using the professional judgment of the veterinary staff and are documented and reviewed regularly. Veterinary-related social housing exemptions for nonhuman primates must be reviewed by the veterinarian at least every 30 days unless the exemption is based on a permanent condition.⁷

In the absence of conspecifics, additional environmental or other enrichment should be offered, and will vary depending on the species.

References

1. Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, 8th edition. 2011. ILAR, NAS
2. AAALAC Position Statement on Social Housing: <https://www.aaalac.org/accreditation-program/position-statements/#social>
3. Association of Primate Veterinarians’ Socialization Guideline for Nonhuman Primate in Biomedical Research: <https://www.primatévets.org/guidance-documents>
4. Van Loo, PLP et al. 2007. Impact of ‘Living Apart Together’ on Postoperative Recovery of Mice Compared with Social and Individual Housing. *Lab Animals*. 441-455.
5. The Jackson Laboratory Blog Post. Six Steps for Setting up Timed-Pregnant Mice. September 2, 2014. <https://www.jax.org/news-and-insights/jax-blog/2014/september/six-steps-for-setting-up-timed->

[pregnant-mice#](#)

6. Krueger LD et al. 2020. Enrichment Preferences for Singly Housed Zebrafish (*Danio rerio*). JAALAS. 59: 148-155.
7. USDA, [Animal Welfare Act Regulations](#)

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