

**AEC COVID-19 OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES**

The Australian Code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes, 2013 [ss2.1.1(vii)] states that institutions must ensure that the Animal Ethics Committee approves guidelines for animal care and use within the institution and that these are implemented, including those which ensure that emergencies are detected promptly and dealt with effectively.

The intent of this plan is to: (i) preserve and manage animals on AEC approved projects while maintaining animal welfare standards; and (ii) ensure that animals that are at risk are humanely euthanized promptly.

**Context:**

All UWA staff and students must heed directives provided by the institution or the government, as summarized at <https://www.web.uwa.edu.au/novel-coronavirus>

The coronavirus pandemic may impact approved UWA AEC projects in a number of ways:

1. Animal care and research or teaching staff and students are required for animal husbandry and research or teaching procedures if these activities are to continue. Current PPE requirements continue to be compulsory and every effort will be made to minimize contact between people as they enter facilities, use changing rooms and work in shared procedure rooms.
2. Animal welfare impact of shortage of animal care staff and/or consumables, such as, bedding, food and PPE. This may require a change in animal husbandry practices, for example, reducing frequency of cage changes and checking of animal wellbeing and therefore a deviation from Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).
3. Animal welfare impact of reduced research staff or the need to use less experienced research staff who are not fully assessed and/or competent in the approved procedures that are required. Alternative options for staff and procedures (including timing of sequential procedures), veterinary medicines, or euthanasia methods and animal wellbeing monitoring schedules may be required.
4. Essential care service delivery is the responsibility of Animal Care Services (ACS) and facility curators (outside ACS). ACS or relevant facility curator will be included in planning for projects, in particular, those that include technically demanding or high welfare risk activities or procedures.
5. Change in the AEC approved Cost-Benefit analysis for the project.
6. A university shut down may result in no or limited access to administration systems, including AEC approved protocols, so alternative interim information and communication processes may be required.

**Contingency Plan:**

1. Maintain a current list of all Chief Investigators (CI) and project numbers (by CI surname) currently with animals in use with emergency contact details.
2. Ensure up-to-date contact information is easily available for key research staff, including details of ACS Emergency Response Team.
3. Reinforce to all staff, and all CIs and their teams, the importance of 'social distancing' practices and isolation if needed.
4. Ask each CI to submit an **AEC COVID-19 Contingency Plan** to Animal Ethics Office (AEO) for each current AEC approved project. This Plan will indicate whether the AEC Protocol a) has been paused, or b) is continuing. If the latter, the Plan must indicate a Research Contingency to be followed if staff numbers are reduced by COVID-19, to an extent that impacts the ability of the project to proceed under the currently approved protocol. All **AEC COVID-19 Contingency Plans** will be submitted for approval by the AEC. These Plans may be revised and resubmitted as circumstances change.

5. It is possible that actions to support animal welfare may be required, that sit outside the AEC-approved **AEC COVID-19 Contingency Plans**. In such cases, the Animal Welfare Officer (AWO) or Director, Animal Care Services (DACS) or delegate, are authorised to act in the best interests of the animals with all actions based on the:
  - a. assessment of the extent and likelihood of the animal welfare impact,
  - b. achievability of accurate and translatable research results, and
  - c. value of the animal model (e.g. rare or essential).
6. Decisions about such non-AEC approved actions, will be made on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with AWO, DACS, AEC Chair and Chief Investigator or delegates, if available and DVCR if required. If no staff are available for consultation then actions will occur in a relevant and timely manner.
7. AWO/DACS-authorized actions may include:
  - a. changes consistent with a MINOR amendment e.g. change to personnel or roles e.g. Animal Care staff undertaking research procedures or monitoring or experienced research staff undertaking husbandry such as cage changes,
  - b. changes to non-surgical procedures consistent with a MINOR amendment,
  - c. veterinary treatments as per current procedures, and
  - d. changes to monitoring regimes including reduced frequency of monitoring, stopping procedures, removing treatments and euthanasia.
8. Any changes to surgical procedures (consistent with a MAJOR amendment) will continue to require a major amendment application to the AEC.
9. ACS personnel to develop protocols for social distancing in animal facility change/gown up areas.
10. Actions can be approved verbally with follow up correspondence by email or completion of an amendment. Records will be kept and reported to the AEC as soon as possible.
11. Administration of minor delegated functions (PUA, Minor amendments, Observational studies) can be approved verbally with follow up correspondence by email.
12. Following actions or amendments, relevant documents (e.g. AEC approved protocols) will be updated with actions (by track change) or amended and linked through facilities management software system, as per usual process, as soon as practicable.

**Delegate** - Person with appropriate skills and experience who may be a university employee or if no internal staff are available then an external service provider may be utilized e.g. private veterinary practitioner.  
Note: oversight by UWA senior management e.g. ACS Veterinary Officer or DACS.

#### **Linked documents**

- AEC Operating Procedures
  - ACS CoViD-19 Response
  - AEC COVID-19 Contingency Plan
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