

MOUSE OVERCROWDED CAGE POLICY

Responsible Official: **VP for Research Administration**

Administering Division/Department: **IACUC**

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OVERCROWDED CAGES¹

Cages are considered overcrowded either because litters need to be weaned or there are too many post-weanling and/or adults in one cage. See maximum density limits listed below in Item 2.

Overcrowded cages must be corrected within 48 hours of notification.

The cage limits will be no more than 5 adults, or one breeder pair (pup density is unrestricted), or a trio (pup density is unrestricted if all pups are less than 14 days of age). For a trio with one or more pups older than 14 days of age, pup density is limited to 12 pups per cage.

While the animal resources programs of the School of Medicine (SOM) and Yerkes National Primate Research Center are each responsible for correcting overcrowding, the IACUC advises against relying upon this safeguard as research personnel have the best knowledge of the genotype and pedigree information vital to new cage cards.

Exemptions to this policy are permitted only upon specific IACUC review and approval.

HOUSING DENSITY COMPLIANCE PROCEDURE

The following procedure describes housing densities for the various sizes of mouse cages maintained at Emory University animal facilities. This procedure must be followed to ensure compliance with the NIH "Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals" (NRC, 2010) and norms for production colonies of mice.

1. Mating may be established as pairs (one male, one female) or trios (one male, two females).²
2. Maximum densities for mice housed in microisolators are as follows:
 - 5 adult mice per cage
 - Breeding pairs: pup density is unrestricted
 - Breeding trios: pup density is unrestricted when all pups are less than 14 days of age, but must be reduced to a maximum of 12 pups per cage where one or more pups is at least 14 days of age.
3. Litters are to be weaned between 19 and 24 days postpartum.
4. It is the responsibility of the investigator to adhere to maximum cage density policies. If an animal care technician observes overcrowded cages, he/she will notify the investigator or his designated contact person of the situation. The cage will be flagged and an

Overcrowded Cage Notice noting location of the cage will be sent to the investigator or contact person. Once notified, the investigator will be given 48 hours to correct the overcrowded cage. The “per cage” charge for this notification service can be found on the respective DAR website.

5. If the overcrowded cage is not corrected within the designated period, the animal care technician will be responsible for correcting the cage. The technician will place mice in separate cages to comply with density policies and will assign new cards to the cages with the following information: Investigator, protocol number, sex, number of mice, parent cage identification.

6. Exceptions to this policy will be considered by the IACUC on a case-by-case basis and as identified and addressed in the applicable protocol as an original or as amended.

7. Where the IACUC has granted an approval for > 5 adult mice per cage, litter densities in excess of #2 above, or weaning delayed after 24 days of age, it is the responsibility of protocol-associated personnel, if purchasing animals, to detail the exemption in the “Detailed Specifications” section of the Animal Order form. This will allow animal resources administrative staff to confirm the exemption and appropriately annotate cage cards. In the case where exemptions apply to in-house breeding colonies, it is the responsibility of persons managing the breeding colony/colonies to clearly identify cages where an exemption applies.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Prior practice of allowing 6 adults per Super Mouse™ microisolator cage (484cm²) at the SOM DAR has been discontinued as it exceeded the regulatory allowance dating to 1996 for male mice and was unmanageable otherwise.
- ²Greater ratios of females-to-males are allowed up to a total of 5 mice in the cage, but gravid females in excess of 2 must be immediately removed at the time noted to be visibly pregnant and before giving birth to provide proper adjustment to the permissible 1:1 or 2:1 female-to-male breeder ratio.