



PEOPLE FOR  
THE ETHICAL  
TREATMENT  
OF ANIMALS

April 27, 2020

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Via e-mail: [rpaul.johnson@emory.edu](mailto:rpaul.johnson@emory.edu)

Dear Dr. Johnson,

I am writing on behalf of our 6.5 million members and supporters to ask you to take immediate action to protect the health of thousands of monkeys and ensure that research integrity is maintained at your federally-funded primate research facility. In a [media report](#) last month, directors of three of the country's seven National Primate Research Centers stated that primate colonies were being closely monitored for COVID-19, yet they were clear to acknowledge that their colonies are at risk as well as their uncertainty at preventing accidental exposure from infected humans. We at PETA did not find their observations comforting:

“Keeping the virus out of primate colonies across the country will be essential for SARS-CoV-2 research, [Jeffrey] Roberts and other center officials say. Once an animal has been infected, it can't be used for research, so any colony outbreak would severely limit the number of animals available for COVID-19 experiments.”

“If we wanted to test the efficacy of a vaccine and the animals have already been exposed [to the virus] and gotten over [an infection], you can't infect them, so you couldn't tell whether the vaccine's protective,” [Skip]Bohm says. “You couldn't do drug treatment studies to see if you could cure the disease because you couldn't infect [the animals].”

Dr. Thompson-Iritani is quoted in the article saying “...[T]he animals at the Washington site are fairly well protected from accidentally contracting SARS-CoV-2 from humans...”. [March 19, 2020 The Scientist](#)

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COVID-19 has infected humans across our country and many of those infections have been asymptomatic, thereby increasing the likelihood that staff may have already exposed your colony. Statements such as those given by NPRC directors about the consequences of unintentional infections are alarming. Colonies that are at best “fairly well protected” during a pandemic ***undermine the very reason that primate experimenters claim to need to cage and maintain 100,000-plus primates in laboratories.***

Animal care and husbandry staff are notoriously overworked and marginalized at primate facilities and certainly even more so now. There is every expectation that technicians and husbandry staff are coming to work every day to care for the animals even if they themselves are feeling unwell. Shortages in PPE are impacting primate research facilities and SOPs designed to prevent the spread of infections, weak as they are at most facilities, are now even more compromised. Vacancies in primate animal care technicians and veterinarians are posted for every primate research and breeding facility across the country.

As you likely know, animal “models” overwhelmingly fail to lead to treatments for humans. The NIH reports that 95 percent of new medications that test safe and effective in animals fail in clinical trials.<sup>1</sup> It’s also been shown that 90 percent of basic research, most of which involves animals, fails to lead to human therapies,<sup>2</sup> and as many as 89 percent of preclinical studies, many of which involve animals, could not be reproduced,<sup>3</sup> a fundamental step used to confirm the validity of scientific results. Monkeys who may or may not be harboring various viruses, including COVID-19, will not yield reliable data.

We respectfully request that you immediately provide PETA and the public with the following information:

- a. Documentation that none of your staff have been exposed to or infected with COVID-19
- b. Documentation that none of the primates in your facility have been exposed to or infected with COVID-19
- c. Documentation that simply limiting staff exposure to primates will protect the animals from exposure to COVID-19.

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<sup>1</sup> National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences. Transforming Translational Science. <https://ncats.nih.gov/files/NCATS-factsheet.pdf>. Published Winter 2019. Accessed March 24, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Contopoulos-Ioannidis DG, Ntzani EE, Ioannidis JPA. Translation of highly promising basic science research into clinical applications. *The American Journal of Medicine*. 2003;114:477-84.

<sup>3</sup> Freedman LP, Cockburn IM, Simcoe TS. The economics of reproducibility in preclinical research. *PLoS Biology*. 2015;13(6):e1002165.

We further ask that all current experiments on primates be suspended until and unless, at a minimum, you can demonstrate that no monkeys have been exposed to or infected with COVID-19.

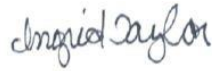
PETA scientists and veterinarians advise both government agencies and private corporations on issues involving research using animals in laboratories. We would be happy to meet with you, on short notice, on this issue. May we hear from you?

Thank you.

Sincerely,



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