

PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

November 30, 2020

Scott A. Rivkees, MD
State Surgeon General and State Health Officer
Florida Department of Health
4052 Bald Cypress Way
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Via e-mail: scott.rivkees@flhealth.gov

Dear Dr. Rivkees,

Thank you in advance for your time. I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and our more than 6.5 million members and supporters worldwide regarding an urgent matter related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which in Florida has resulted in more than 992,000 cases and more than 18,400 deaths.¹ **Given the uncertainty that Florida will be able to sustain its reopening and the high infection rates that continue throughout the country, we urge you to intervene for the sake of public health and permanently end experiments on animals at laboratories and universities in your state, starting with those already deemed by institutions themselves to be non-essential during the initial shutdown because of COVID-19.**

In response to the shutdown, experimenters at laboratories throughout Florida and the U.S. deemed experiments and the animals used in them to be “extraneous” or “non-essential,” among other similar terms—and therefore euthanized thousands of these animals assigned to laboratory experiments. Below are the schools in Florida that issued directives indicating the culling, or likely culling, of animals in laboratories in response to COVID-19:

- Florida State University (FSU): The university informed its experimenters that “all nonessential research occurring in a space owned or secured by FSU must be ramped down.”²

¹Covid in the U.S.: Latest map and case count. *New York Times*. [accessed 2020 Nov. 30]. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html>.

²Ostrander G.K., Fulkerson L., Peluso K. 2020 April 2. FSU research ramp down. [accessed 2020 Nov. 19]. <https://news.fsu.edu/announcements/covid-19/2020/04/02/fsu-research-ramp-down/>.

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- The University of Florida (UF): The university informed its experimenters that “only mission-critical, essential research should continue”³ and urged them to “consider reduction of animal census, including agricultural animals and USDA-covered species.”^{4,5}

PETA questions why any of these animals are being bought, bred, trapped, or experimented on in the first place since they’re now, in response to the pandemic, so readily being disposed of and since experiments are now being ended or delayed. Expending precious research resources and taxpayer funds on animal testing—especially experiments and the animals used in them deemed by the institutions themselves not to be “essential” or “mission-critical”—is the height of absurdity and waste and should not continue, nor should laboratory personnel endanger their health for such experiments.

Research facilities and universities, including FSU and UF, are carrying out plans for a return to laboratory experiments. However, infection rates throughout the U.S. recently hit record highs.⁶ Once-safe activities—including working in close proximity to others in enclosed spaces like laboratories—will continue to pose a risk to human health for the foreseeable future. Particularly given that so many of these animal experiments have already been determined to be non-essential, allowing animal experiments to resume in Florida cannot be justified.

Moreover, if Florida is forced to shut down again, more animals will undoubtedly be euthanized and money that could otherwise have gone to more effective and human-relevant, non-animal studies benefiting public health will be wasted. The possibility that Florida may need to shut down once more cannot be discounted. Dr. Anthony Fauci previously urged states with surging infection rates to “seriously look at shutting down” again.⁷ Forty states have tightened restrictions in November in light of the worsening pandemic; other states have extended previously implemented restrictions.⁸

As the head of the state health agency, per Florida Statutes § 381.00315(1)(c), you have the authority to intervene to prevent activities that pose a risk to public health during a

³2020 March 23. Impact of COVID-19 on research and sponsored programs. [accessed 2020 April 5]. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200405200723/https://research.ufl.edu/covid-19-updates.html>. The original source of this information has been updated (<https://research.ufl.edu/covid-19-updates.html>).

⁴Ibid.

⁵Confirming the discontinuation of animal experiments at UF, on March 27, 2020, Professor Joseph E. Funderburk (@jftrips) tweeted: “University of Florida - animal research suspended. Only research staff deemed as essential allowed on campus. Data collection not allowed.” His tweet can be found here: <https://twitter.com/jftrips/status/1243547868528545793>.

⁶Covid-19: U.S. records 1 million new cases in a week. *New York Times*. [accessed 2020 Nov. 16]. <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2020/11/15/world/covid-19-coronavirus>.

⁷Feuer W. 2020 July 9. States with severe coronavirus outbreaks should ‘seriously look at shutting down,’ Dr. Fauci says. *CNBC*. [accessed 2020 Nov. 17]. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/09/states-with-severe-coronavirus-outbreaks-should-seriously-look-at-shutting-down-dr-fauci-says.html>.

⁸COVID-19 restrictions: Map of COVID-19 case trends, restrictions and mobility. *USA Today*. [accessed 2020 Nov. 30]. <https://www.usatoday.com/storytelling/coronavirus-reopening-america-map/#restrictions>.

public health emergency. Would you please intervene to end experiments on animals, starting with those previously deemed by institutions to be non-essential or described using similar terminology, which pose an unjustifiable risk to those working in laboratories and the public more broadly?

You can contact me at ShalinG@peta.org or 757-962-8325. We look forward to your reply to this rapidly developing and urgent matter. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shalin G. Gala". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "S" that loops under the rest of the name.

Shalin G. Gala
Vice President, International Laboratory Methods
Laboratory Investigations Department