

PEOPLE FOR  
THE ETHICAL  
TREATMENT  
OF ANIMALS

December 9, 2020

The Honorable Greg Abbott  
Governor  
State of Texas  
c/o Morgan Stewart, Executive Assistant

Cecile Erwin Young  
Executive Commissioner  
Texas Health and Human Services Commission

Via e-mail: [morgan.stewart@gov.texas.gov](mailto:morgan.stewart@gov.texas.gov);  
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Dear Governor Abbott and Executive Commissioner Young,

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 Texas has resulted in more than 1.3 million cases and more than 23,400 deaths.<sup>1</sup> **Given the uncertainty of the reopening of Texas and the continued high infection rates 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 Texas 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 universities and health institutions in Texas that issued guidance indicating, or likely indicating, the culling of animals in laboratories in response to COVID-19:

- Baylor University: The school asked its experimenters to “[i]dentify any non-critical research experiments that can be

<sup>1</sup>Covid in the U.S.: Latest map and case count. *New York Times*. [accessed 2020 Dec. 9]. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html>.

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- ramped down or delayed” and to “avoid extra or unneeded rodents and reduce colony size.”<sup>2</sup>
- Texas A&M University (TAMU): The school asked its staff to “[s]uspend all research activities that have not been approved as essential,” “[c]ancel all outstanding animal orders for non-essential research,” “[c]ontinue to reduce cage census,” and “not initiate new animal studies.”<sup>3</sup>
  - The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA): The school urged its staff to “[r]educe your colony size by eliminating animals that will not be used in experiments” and to “[r]educe the number of breeding cages in your colony if you will not be using these animals.”<sup>4</sup>
  - The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (UTHSCSA): The institution asked its staff to “DELAY initiation of new, approved animal experiments that would increase the number of cages in-house,” to “focus their efforts on maintaining or decreasing the current number of cages in their rodent colony,” and to “review current rodent cage counts with their staff and remove excess from their census.”<sup>5</sup>
  - The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston (UTMB): The institution requested that its staff “not initiate any new animal projects and consider reducing current rodent colony size as much and as quickly as possible,” “reduce experiments and animal use whenever possible,” “[l]imit rodent breeding to maintenance of replacement breeders only,” “[d]elay experiments requiring significant post-procedural care,” and “[d]elay non-time-sensitive animal experiments.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>2020 March 23. COVID-19 research update. [accessed 2020 March 25].

<https://web.archive.org/web/20200325160936/https://www.baylor.edu/research/resources/index.php?id=967805>.

The original source of this information has been updated (<https://www.baylor.edu/research/resources/index.php?id=967805#0>).

<sup>3</sup>2020 May 13. Research guidance during COVID-19. [https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/TEXAS\\_AM\\_Updated\\_May\\_2020\\_Research-Guidance-during-COVID-19---Division-of-Research.pdf](https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/TEXAS_AM_Updated_May_2020_Research-Guidance-during-COVID-19---Division-of-Research.pdf). The original source of this information has been updated ([https://vpr.tamu.edu/covid-19/?\\_ga=2.175374181.657779861.1584721438-565303371.1583428777](https://vpr.tamu.edu/covid-19/?_ga=2.175374181.657779861.1584721438-565303371.1583428777)).

<sup>4</sup>2020 March 19. Coronavirus (COVID-19) impact on UTA research. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/University-of-Texas-at-Arlington-COVID-19-directive-regarding-animal-research.pdf>. The original source of this information has been updated (<https://resources.uta.edu/research/coronavirus/index.php>).

<sup>5</sup>Giuffrida A. 2020 March 30. A message from the vice president for research. [accessed 2020 Dec. 8]. <https://wp.uthscsa.edu/coronavirus/2020/03/30/03-30-20-vpr-message/>.

<sup>6</sup>2020 March 24. UTMB ARC COVID-19 response updates. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/University-of-Texas-Medical-Branch-at-Galveston-COVID-19-directive-regarding-animal-research.pdf>. Access to the original source of this information is not consistent, and users might be required to log in

([https://liveutmb.sharepoint.com/sites/collaboration/webfiles/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2Fcollaboration%2Fwebfiles%2FShared%20Documents%2FResearch%20Resources%2FResearch%20Resources%20Webfiles%2FCOVID19AnimalSubjects%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2Fcollaboration%2Fwebfiles%2FShared%20Documents%2FResearch%20Resources%2FResearch%20Resources%20Webfiles&p=true&originalPath=aHR0cHM6Ly9saXZldXRtYi5zaGFyZXBvaW50LmNvbS86Yjovcy9jb2xsYWJvcnF0aW9uL3dlYmZpbGVzL0VvVdERsZjRGN1ExSnZsaEN6YWVvYkhvQlA5NnhZcm9odjUzTTYxOFpqZ3NMbHc\\_cnrpbWU9U19BaFJQSG0xMGc](https://liveutmb.sharepoint.com/sites/collaboration/webfiles/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2Fcollaboration%2Fwebfiles%2FShared%20Documents%2FResearch%20Resources%2FResearch%20Resources%20Webfiles%2FCOVID19AnimalSubjects%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2Fcollaboration%2Fwebfiles%2FShared%20Documents%2FResearch%20Resources%2FResearch%20Resources%20Webfiles&p=true&originalPath=aHR0cHM6Ly9saXZldXRtYi5zaGFyZXBvaW50LmNvbS86Yjovcy9jb2xsYWJvcnF0aW9uL3dlYmZpbGVzL0VvVdERsZjRGN1ExSnZsaEN6YWVvYkhvQlA5NnhZcm9odjUzTTYxOFpqZ3NMbHc_cnrpbWU9U19BaFJQSG0xMGc)).

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 to be “non-critical” or “non-essential”—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 Baylor, TAMU, and institutions in the University of Texas System, are carrying out plans for a return to laboratory experiments. However, infection rates throughout the U.S. recently hit record highs.<sup>7</sup> 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 Texas cannot be justified.

Moreover, if Texas 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 Texas 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.<sup>8</sup> Forty states tightened restrictions in November in light of the worsening pandemic; other states have extended previously implemented restrictions.<sup>9</sup>

We urge you, as leaders of the response to COVID-19 in Texas, to use your concurrent authority 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](mailto:ShalinG@peta.org) or 757-962-8325. We look forward to your reply to this rapidly developing and urgent matter. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,



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<sup>7</sup>Covid-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>.

<sup>8</sup>Feuer 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>.

<sup>9</sup>COVID-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>.