

PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

December 7, 2020

The Honorable Roy Cooper
Governor
State of North CarolinaMandy K. Cohen, MD, MPH
Secretary
North Carolina Department of Health and Human ServicesVia e-mail: roy.cooper@nc.gov; mandy.cohen@dhhs.nc.gov

Dear Governor Cooper and Secretary Cohen,

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 North Carolina has resulted in more than 395,000 cases and more than 5,500 deaths.¹ **Given the uncertainty of the reopening of North Carolina 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 North Carolina 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 North Carolina that issued guidance indicating, or likely indicating, the culling of animals in laboratories in response to COVID-19:

¹Covid in the U.S.: Latest map and case count. *New York Times*. [accessed 2020 Dec. 7]. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html>.

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- Duke University: The school issued a “research curtailment directive” according to which only the experiments “defined as essential” are allowed.^{2,3}
- The University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill: The school informed its experimenters that “[a]ny lab-based research or core activity that is not approved as ‘critical research activity’ is expected to be ramped down, curtailed, suspended, or delayed as soon as possible and no later than Wednesday, March 25” and urged them to “indicate which of their rodent cages are priority and are critical to maintain” by “writing ‘PRIORITY’ in red ink on the DCM RFID card.”⁴

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 not “essential” or “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 UNC–Chapel Hill, are carrying out plans for a return to laboratory experiments. However, infection rates in North Carolina and throughout the U.S. recently hit record highs.^{5,6} 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 North Carolina cannot be justified.

Moreover, if North Carolina 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 North Carolina 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

²Animal research. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Duke-University-COVID-19-directive-regarding-animal-research.pdf>. The original source of this information has been updated (<https://research.duke.edu/covid-19-animal-research>).

³Confirming the culling of animals at Duke, on March 20, 2020, Ozgun Erdogan (@kurabikuru), a postdoctoral associate at Duke University School of Medicine, tweeted: “I culled 168 mice this week. All my work hours are simply gone to trash. I am grieving but also trying to learn to work from home, which turns out a bigger challenge than trying to focus in the lab while people walk by. Now, I am my own distraction. #workfromhome #labshutdown.” Her tweet can be viewed here: <https://twitter.com/kurabikuru/status/1241130520144154630>.

⁴2020 March 19. COVID-19 guidance from UNC DCM management. [accessed 2020 Dec. 3]. <https://research.unc.edu/comparative-medicine/covid-19-guidance-animal-models/>.

⁵CBS 17 Digital Desk. 2020 Dec. 2. COVID-19 in NC: Daily percent positive rate hits 11.4%; hospitalizations set record again. *CBS 17*. [accessed 2020 Dec. 5]. <https://www.cbs17.com/community/health/coronavirus/covid-19-in-nc-daily-percent-positive-rate-hits-11-4-hospitalizations-set-record-again/>.

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>.

down” again.⁷ Forty states, including North Carolina, tightened restrictions in November in light of the worsening pandemic; other states have extended previously implemented restrictions.⁸

We urge you, as leaders of the response to COVID-19 in North Carolina, 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 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, looping initial "S".

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

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 Dec. 3]. <https://www.usatoday.com/storytelling/coronavirus-reopening-america-map/#restrictions>.