

PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

December 9, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor
State of New York
c/o Melissa DeRosa, Secretary to the Governor

Howard A. Zucker, MD, JD, LLM
Commissioner
New York State Department of Health

Via e-mail: melissa.derosa@exec.ny.gov;
howard.zucker@health.ny.gov

Dear Governor Cuomo and Commissioner Zucker,

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 New York has resulted in more than 728,000 cases and more than 34,700 deaths.¹ **Given the uncertainty of the reopening of New York 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 New York 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 New York that issued guidance indicating, or likely indicating, the culling of animals in laboratories in response to COVID-19:

- The City University of New York (CUNY): The school urged its experimenters to “[suspend] projects and not start new

¹Covid 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>.

Washington
1536 16th St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
202-483-PETA

Los Angeles
2154 W. Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90026
323-644-PETA

Norfolk
501 Front St.
Norfolk, VA 23510
757-622-PETA

Info@peta.org
PETA.org

Affiliates:

- PETA Asia
- PETA India
- PETA France
- PETA Australia
- PETA Germany
- PETA Netherlands
- PETA Foundation (U.K.)

- projects requiring on-site activities,” and it informed them that “[o]rders for additional animals should be suspended.”²
- Columbia University: The school announced “a rapid ramping down of research activities.”^{3,4}
 - Cornell University: The school implemented a contingency plan to “identify all essential animal cages” and “essential tanks” and to “cease all invasive research procedures.”⁵
 - New York University (NYU): The school announced that “non-essential research” was suspended and “[o]nly critical research” was allowed to continue.^{6,7}
 - The Rockefeller University: The school urged its experimenters to “identify essential research experiments,” admitting that “[t]his high priority work should be a very limited set of the current laboratory bench-based experimentation,”⁸ and to implement “actions such as reducing or cessation of breeding, unless critical to

²2020 March 26. Research continuity. [accessed 2020 April 10].

<https://web.archive.org/web/20200410013529/https://www.cuny.edu/research/>. The original source of this information has been updated (<https://www.cuny.edu/research/>).

³Goldman L. 2020 March 15. Re: Message from Dean Goldman regarding urgent ramp-down of CUIMC research. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Columbia-University-COVID-19-directive-regarding-animal-research.pdf>. The original source of this information has been removed from Columbia’s website (<https://research.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/SPA/Coronavirus/Message%20from%20Dean%20Goldman%20regarding%20urgent%20ramp-down%20of%20CUIMC%20research.pdf>).

⁴Confirming the culling of animals at Columbia, on March 16, 2020, assistant professor Christine Chio (@Chiolaboratory) tweeted: “It was a very difficult decision. But it is the right thing to do. We culled 40% of our colony today and aborted all non essential experiments. Let’s find a good way to stay connected and make good use of these 8 weeks!” Her tweet can be viewed here: <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Chiolaboratory-March-16-2020-tweet-Columbia-University.jpg>. The original post has been deleted (<https://twitter.com/Chiolaboratory/status/1239734186497445888>). Additionally, on March 22, 2020, Lisa Laru (@laru_lisa) tweeted: “Healthy mice being flagged for euthanasia at columbia university medical center in manhattan [sic] due to lack of staffing due to covid. What a waste.” Her tweet can be viewed here: https://twitter.com/laru_lisa/status/1241862870515830795.

⁵Lipman N.S. 2020 March 17. Coronavirus (COVID-19) and WCM’s animal care and use program. [accessed 2020 March 30]. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200330084541/https://research.weill.cornell.edu/node/6617>. The original source of this information is now password-protected (<https://research.weill.cornell.edu/node/6617>).

⁶Bloom S.G. 2020 March 20. Suspension of non-essential research. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/New-York-University-COVID-19-directive-regarding-animal-research.pdf>. The original source of this information has been removed from NYU’s website (<https://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-wellness/coronavirus-information/messages-to-the-community/suspension-of-non-essential-research.htm>).

⁷Confirming the culling of animals at NYU, on March 13, 2020, assistant professor Simon Peron (@PeronLab) tweeted: “We just euthanized a bunch of mice that were well trained but still needed 2 weeks of experiment time. Wish we had widespread testing so that we could make this decision intelligently; instead, I am just assuming the worst.” His tweet can be viewed here: <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/PeronLab-March-13-2020-tweet-New-York-University.jpg>. The original post has been deleted (<https://twitter.com/PeronLab/status/1238517106624339969>).

⁸Guidance for closing laboratories. [accessed 2020 Dec. 7]. <https://www.rockefeller.edu/coronavirus/guidance-closing-laboratories/>.

maintain the mouse strain.”⁹ It also suspended “[a]ll bench-based laboratory activity, with the exception of COVID-19-related research projects.”¹⁰

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 CUNY, Columbia, Cornell, NYU, and Rockefeller, are carrying out plans for a return to laboratory experiments. However, infection rates throughout the U.S. recently hit record highs.¹¹ Among those who have recently tested positive for COVID-19 are former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani¹² and New York state senator George M. Borrello.¹³ 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 New York cannot be justified.

Moreover, if New York 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 New York 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.¹⁴ Forty states, including New York, tightened restrictions in November in light of the worsening pandemic; other states have extended previously implemented restrictions.¹⁵

⁹Tolwani R. Comparative Biosciences Center COVID-19 response plan. [accessed 2020 Dec. 7]. <https://www.rockefeller.edu/coronavirus/comparative-biosciences-center-covid-19-response-plan/>.

¹⁰Guidance for conduct of approved COVID-19-related research during university closure. [accessed 2020 Dec. 7]. <https://www.rockefeller.edu/coronavirus/guidance-conduct-approved-covid-19-related-research-university-closure/>.

¹¹Covid-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>.

¹²Ballhaus R. 2020 Dec. 6. Rudy Giuliani tests positive for Covid-19, admitted to hospital. *Wall Street Journal*. [accessed 2020 Dec. 8]. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/rudy-giuliani-tests-positive-for-covid-19-trump-says-11607286624>.

¹³Erbacher M. 2020 Dec. 7. New York state senator George M. Borrello and wife, Kelly, test positive for COVID-19. *WKBW*. [accessed 2020 Dec. 8]. <https://www.wkbw.com/news/state-news/new-york-state-senator-george-m-borrello-and-wife-kelly-test-positive-for-covid-19>.

¹⁴Feuer 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>.

¹⁵COVID-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>.

We urge you, as leaders of the response to COVID-19 in New York, 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, sweeping initial "S" that loops under the rest of the name.

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