

PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

December 8, 2020

The Honorable Gina Raimondo
Governor
State of Rhode IslandNicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH
Director
Rhode Island Department of HealthVia e-mail: gina.raimondo@governor.ri.gov;
nicole.alexanderscott@health.ri.gov

Dear Governor Raimondo and Director Alexander-Scott,

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 Rhode Island has resulted in more than 65,000 cases and more than 1,400 deaths.¹ **Given the uncertainty of the reopening of Rhode Island 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 Rhode Island 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 Rhode Island that issued guidance indicating, or likely indicating, the culling of animals in laboratories in response to COVID-19:

- Brown University: The school urged its experimenters to start “ramping down on-campus research activities” and to be prepared for the restriction of “non-critical” research.²

¹Covid in the U.S.: Latest map and case count. *New York Times*. [accessed 2020 Dec. 8]. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html>.

²Locke R.M., Pipher J. 2020 March 15. To Brown researchers: Ramping down research activities to reduce exposure. [accessed 2020 Dec. 6]. <https://covid.brown.edu/news/2020-03-15/research>.

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- University of Rhode Island (URI): The school informed its experimenters that “[a]ll non-essential animal research . . . needs to be drawn down and halted” and that for long-term studies, “preparations should be made to reduce animal counts to minimal needed to complete study goals.”³

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 Brown and URI, are carrying out plans for a return to laboratory experiments. However, infection rates throughout the U.S. recently hit record highs.⁴ Rhode Island is now reporting the highest number of new cases per capita in the last seven days.⁵ 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 Rhode Island cannot be justified.

Moreover, if Rhode Island 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 Rhode Island 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.⁶ Forty states, including Rhode Island, tightened restrictions in November in light of the worsening pandemic; other states have extended previously implemented restrictions.⁷

We urge you, as leaders of the response to COVID-19 in Rhode Island, 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.

³COVID-19 research involving animals. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/University-of-Rhode-Island-COVID-19-directive-regarding-animal-research.pdf>. The original source of this information has been updated (<https://web.uri.edu/research-admin/externalrelations/news/covid-19-research-involving-animals/>).

⁴Covid-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>.

⁵Covid in the U.S.: Latest map and case count. *New York Times*. [accessed 2020 Dec. 8]. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html>.

⁶Feuer 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>.

⁷COVID-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>.

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