

PEOPLE FOR  
THE ETHICAL  
TREATMENT  
OF ANIMALS

December 2, 2020

The Honorable Gretchen Whitmer  
Governor  
State of Michigan

Robert Gordon  
Director  
Michigan Department of Health & Human Services

Via e-mail: [gretchen.whitmer@michigan.gov](mailto:gretchen.whitmer@michigan.gov);  
[gordonr3@michigan.gov](mailto:gordonr3@michigan.gov)

Dear Governor Whitmer and Director Gordon,

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 Michigan has resulted in more than 394,000 cases and more than 9,700 deaths.<sup>1</sup> **Given the uncertainty of the reopening of Michigan 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 in Michigan and throughout 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. The University of Michigan (UM) urged its experimenters to “ramp down all noncritical laboratory research activities”<sup>2</sup> by identifying “up to 20%

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<sup>1</sup>Covid in the U.S.: Latest map and case count. *New York Times*. [accessed 2020 Dec. 2]. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html>.

<sup>2</sup>Cunningham R., Collins S.M. 2020 March 18. U-M ramps down noncritical laboratory research activities. [accessed 2020 Nov. 27]. [https://research.umich.edu/sites/default/files/resource-download/covid-19\\_u-m\\_ramps\\_down\\_noncritical\\_laboratory\\_research\\_activities.pdf](https://research.umich.edu/sites/default/files/resource-download/covid-19_u-m_ramps_down_noncritical_laboratory_research_activities.pdf).

Affiliates:

- PETA Asia
- PETA India
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- PETA Australia
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of animals . . . that [they] consider most critical to save”<sup>3</sup> and euthanizing “males if there are several of the same strain”<sup>4</sup> and pups “prior to weaning.”<sup>5</sup>

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 “noncritical”—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 UM, are carrying out plans for a return to laboratory experiments. However, infection rates throughout the U.S. recently hit record highs.<sup>6</sup> Among those who tested positive for COVID-19 in the past month are several Michigan lawmakers, including most recently state Rep. John Chirkun.<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 Michigan cannot be justified.

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

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<sup>3</sup>King W.W., Greer W.G. 2020 March 16. Guidance on COVID-19 situation: Safeguarding & supporting your animal research. [accessed 2020 Nov. 27]. <https://mailchi.mp/umich/covid-19-animalcare-guidance-3162020-2>.

<sup>4</sup>COVID-19: Guiding principles for working safely with research animals in the vivarium. [accessed 2020 Nov. 27]. <https://animalcare.umich.edu/announcements/covid-19-guiding-principles-working-safely-research-animals-vivarium>.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</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>7</sup>Gibbons L. 2020 Dec. 1. Michigan state Rep. John Chirkun tests positive for COVID-19. *MLive*. [accessed 2020 Dec. 1]. <https://www.mlive.com/public-interest/2020/12/michigan-state-rep-john-chirkun-tests-positive-for-covid-19.html>.

<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. 27]. <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>.

We urge you, as leaders of the response to COVID-19 in Michigan, 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,

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  
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