

PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

December 8, 2020

The Honorable Tom Wolf
Governor
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Rachel Levine, MD
Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Health

Via e-mail: twolf@pa.gov; rlevine@pa.gov

Dear Governor Wolf and Secretary Levine,

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 Pennsylvania has resulted in more than 432,000 cases and more than 11,400 deaths.¹

Given the uncertainty of the reopening of Pennsylvania 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 Pennsylvania 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 Pennsylvania that issued guidance indicating, or likely indicating, the culling of animals in laboratories in response to COVID-19:

- Carnegie Mellon University (CMU): The school asked its experimenters to prepare “for a ramp down of research”² and consider “means to reduce the required husbandry” by “decreasing animal

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>.

²Research at CMU during the COVID-19 pandemic. [accessed 2020 Dec. 6]. <https://www.cmu.edu/alert/coronavirus/resources/researcher-resources.html>.

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- census numbers, ceasing breeding activities” and, if necessary, “depopulating [their] animal colon[ies].”^{3,4}
- Drexel University: The school suspended “on-campus, non-critical research activities” and urged its experimenters to “cull all non-critical animals,” stating that “[n]on-critical animals should be euthanized.”⁵
 - Penn State University: The school urged its experimenters to “immediately begin preparing for all on-campus research to be reduced to essential research-related activities by March 24,”⁶ informed them that “no new animal work may be initiated” starting March 23, and asked them to “[p]repare to terminate projects that are underway,” “[r]educe breeding to a minimal level,” and “[i]dentify critical/priority cages (founder stock for breeding colonies, irreplaceable animals, etc.).”⁷
 - University of Pittsburgh (Pitt): The school urged its experimenters to “[i]dentify all non-essential research-related activities that can be delayed, ramped down, curtailed, or suspended . . . and begin the process to do so.”⁸

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 CMU, Drexel, Penn State, and Pitt, are carrying out plans for a return to laboratory experiments. However, infection rates in

³2020 March 13. COVID-19 pandemic preparedness guide for researchers. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Carnegie-Mellon-University-COVID-19-directive-regarding-animal-research.pdf>. The original source of this information has been updated (<https://www.cmu.edu/research-office/communications/pandemic-preparedness-guide.pdf>).

⁴Confirming the culling of animals at CMU, on March 20, 2020, associate professor of chemical engineering and biomedical engineering Katie Whitehead (@KWhiteheadLab) tweeted: “Lab is shut down. Grieving the 600 mice we culled, our time, our funding, and the once-in-a-lifetime chance to study the cells in my early-stage breast milk. Hopefully, we’ll find other donors but I would have been longitudinal & fully compliant. Today, it’s mostly terrible.” Her tweet can be viewed here: https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/KWhiteheadLab_March-20-2020-tweet-Carnegie-Mellon-University.jpg. The original post has been deleted (<https://twitter.com/KWhiteheadLab/status/1241105413870927873?s=20>).

⁵Research involving animal models. [accessed 2020 Dec. 6]. <https://drexel.edu/research/resources/response-to-covid-19-pandemic/ramp-down-efforts/research-involving-animal-models/>.

⁶Reducing research activities in Penn State labs by March 24. [accessed 2020 Dec. 5]. https://www.research.psu.edu/covid_labs.

⁷2020 March 20. Updates on COVID-19: Animal care and use (IACUC). [accessed 2020 March 20]. https://web.archive.org/web/20200320183902/https://www.research.psu.edu/covid_iacuc. The original source of this information has been updated (https://www.research.psu.edu/covid_iacuc).

⁸Rutenbar R.A., Cudd A.E., Levine A.S. COVID-19: Reduction in research operations. [accessed 2020 Dec. 5]. <https://www.svcresearch.pitt.edu/covid-19-reduction-research-operations>.

Pennsylvania and throughout the U.S. recently hit record highs.^{9,10} Among those who have recently tested positive for COVID-19 in Pennsylvania are several state legislators.^{11,12} 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 Pennsylvania cannot be justified.

Moreover, if Pennsylvania 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 Pennsylvania 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.¹³ Forty states, including Pennsylvania, tightened restrictions in November in light of the worsening pandemic; other states have extended previously implemented restrictions.¹⁴

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



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Laboratory Investigations Department

⁹Lagore C. 2020 Dec. 1. Pa. coronavirus update: 5,676 new cases on highest positivity rate ever; 180 new deaths after slow Thanksgiving reporting; most Lehigh Valley deaths since July | Pa. COVID-19 county map (12/1/20). *LehighValleyLive.com*. [accessed 2020 Dec. 7]. <https://www.lehighvalleylive.com/coronavirus/2020/12/pa-coronavirus-update-5676-new-cases-on-highest-positivity-rate-ever-180-new-deaths-after-slow-thanksgiving-reporting-most-lehigh-valley-deaths-since-july-pa-covid-19-county-map-12120.html>.

¹⁰Covid-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>.

¹¹Carlson C. 2020 Nov. 20. Fifth Pa. state lawmaker tests positive for COVID-19. *Erie News Now*. [accessed 2020 Dec. 7]. <https://www.erienewsnow.com/story/42943910/fourth-pa-state-lawmaker-tests-positive-for-covid19>.

¹²Abad D. 2020 Dec. 1. Another Pennsylvania state lawmaker tests positive for COVID-19. *ABC27*. [accessed 2020 Dec. 7]. <https://www.abc27.com/news/another-pennsylvania-state-lawmaker-tests-positive-for-covid-19/>.

¹³Feuer 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>.

¹⁴COVID-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>.