



Position statement on animals used in research

Ensuring animals have a good life by advocating on their behalf

Key facts...

- ★ The RSPCA's primary goal is the replacement of animal experiments with humane alternatives worldwide.
- ★ It has been estimated that more than 100 million animals are used annually in experiments worldwide, including nearly four million in the UK.
- ★ Animal experiments are done for many different purposes. Each area of animal use raises specific ethical, welfare and scientific issues and there is a range of views within society as to how much suffering should be allowed and for what purpose.
- ★ There is also serious debate and concern, including among scientists themselves, about the usefulness of many animal 'models', and some experiments are badly designed and poorly carried out, wasting animals' lives.
- ★ The RSPCA believes that much more can, and should, be done to avoid animal use, and to reduce the suffering of laboratory animals.

It has been estimated that more than 100 million animals are used annually in experiments worldwide, including nearly 4 million in the UK. Animal experiments are done for many different purposes - some for medical conditions like cancer or Alzheimer's disease, or to develop and test vaccines, pharmaceutical drugs or other treatments, including those for pets and farm animals. However, not all animal experiments are 'vital medical research'. Some are for conditions where pharmaceutical treatment is not the only option - such as obesity or drug addiction - or conditions that many argue do not need 'treating' at all, like male pattern baldness. Animal research and testing is also done to answer questions such as how birds navigate when flying, or to assess the safety of new chemicals that go into products like paints and pesticides. Note that it is no longer legal to use animals to test cosmetics products or ingredients, or to market cosmetics tested on animals, within the UK or the European Union.

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Each area of animal use raises specific ethical, welfare and scientific issues and there is a range of views within society as to how much suffering should be allowed and for what purpose. Even housing animals in a laboratory environment can have a negative effect on welfare and, during and after experiments, laboratory animals experience pain and distress. Sadly, sometimes this can be severe.

The RSPCA believes that much more can, and should, be done to avoid animal use, and to reduce the suffering of laboratory animals.

Severe suffering

The RSPCA is concerned about all levels of laboratory animal suffering, which is classified as mild, moderate or severe under UK law. However, severe suffering is a particular concern and affects large numbers of animals - Home Office statistics revealed that almost 100,000 animals experienced severe suffering in 2017.

For further information or if you have any questions please contact: politicalaffairs@rspca.org.uk

The UK [Animals \(Scientific Procedures\) Act 1986](#) (ASPA), which regulates animal experiments, defines 'severe' procedures as those 'as a result of which the animals are likely to experience severe pain, suffering or distress', 'or 'severe impairment of [their] wellbeing or general condition'. Long-lasting moderate pain, suffering or distress is also classified as severe. Examples of procedures that may fall into this category include severe cancer studies; research into diseases such as spinal cord injury, pancreatitis and Motor Neuron Disease; vaccine testing for regulatory purposes and some regulatory toxicology tests.

The RSPCA has been working on a ground-breaking initiative to end severe suffering since 2012, which has included the creation of an [online resource](#) to help laboratories tackle severe suffering as well as convening two successful international 'Focus on Severe Suffering' [meetings](#). We believe that using this resource to avoid causing severe suffering will significantly reduce harms to animals while their use continues, which is an essential goal in itself besides fulfilling legal requirements and reducing the ethical concerns associated with these studies. It is also widely acknowledged that better animal welfare means better quality science, as untreated pain or distress can negatively affect the outcome of the experiment.

Reducing suffering and improving welfare

The RSPCA works to bring people together to identify and consider key welfare issues associated with specific animals, so they can share experiences and knowledge, challenge current practices and promote advances. For example, animal technologists, scientists and vets attend meetings of the RSPCA/UFAW Rodent and Rabbit Welfare Group and the RSPCA/APHA meetings on the welfare of wild animals used in research.

Challenging animal use: robust ethical review

The RSPCA runs workshops and produces guidance to help members of local ethics committees, known as Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Bodies (AWERBs), effectively challenge whether and how laboratory animals are used.

Under the ASPA, all facilities that use, breed or supply lab animals must have an AWERB in place. This is a local framework that should ensure all animal use is carefully considered and justified, that 'high' standards of animal accommodation and care are achieved, and that animal experiments are replaced wherever possible, animal numbers and suffering are reduced, and welfare is improved. The AWERB has defined tasks and membership, including encouragement to include 'lay' or independent members. The RSPCA believes that this is essential and is committed to supporting and developing the role of lay members.

Improving standards internationally

We deliver training on ethics, animal welfare and the law to people regulating, using and caring for animals in research and testing internationally, especially in East Asia, south Africa and eastern Europe. Training events are developed at the invitation of legislators or laboratory animal science associations and are funded jointly (at minimum cost) by the organising bodies. Common topics include legislation, ethical review, training for personnel, replacing animal experiments and animal care.

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