

Working with Fish

Animal Use Medical Screening (AUMS):

All personnel working with animals, their tissues, or working in areas where animals are housed must submit an Animal Use Medical Screening (AUMS) form every 3 years to screen for exposure to possible health hazards in the work environment. Complete the form online at:

<https://www.ehs.washington.edu/research-lab/animal-use-medical-screening-aums>

Potential zoonotic diseases from fish:

There are a number of infectious agents that are found in fish and in fresh/salt water that have the potential to be transmitted to humans. However besides food poisoning, the overall incidence of transmission of disease from fish to humans is low. In general, people contract fish-borne disease through ingestion of infected fish tissues or water, or by contamination of lacerated or abraded skin.

An important feature of many bacterial and protozoal organisms is their opportunistic nature. Disease in humans often requires a preexisting state that compromises the immune system. If you have an immune-compromising medical condition or you are taking medications that impair your immune system (steroids, immunosuppressive drugs, or chemotherapy) you are at-risk for contracting a fish-borne disease and should consult your healthcare provider.

Review the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website for more information on potential zoonotic disease from fish, and prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/pets/fish.html>

Preventative measures:

- Tetanus booster should be obtained every 10 years.
- Wear appropriate clothing and personal protective equipment (PPE). Wear protective gloves when handling fish. Latex dishwashing gloves may afford greater protection depending on activities. Wash hands thoroughly upon completion of the tasks with the animal and upon removal of the glove/PPE. Use antiseptic hand sanitizer between glove use if needed, until you can get to handwashing facilities.

Injuries:

- See the [EH&S Exposure Response Poster](#).
- Immediately wash area thoroughly with soap and water for at least 15 minutes.
- Control any bleeding and cover with protective dressing (bandage, etc.)
- For any injuries, needlestick/sharps injury or for signs/symptoms of wound infection such as redness, swelling or pain, contact the [Employee Health Center](#) at Hall Health, 206-685-1026. After hours or if the clinic is unavailable, go to the [UWMC Emergency Department](#). For incidents at Harborview, call the Harborview Employee Health Services at 206-744-3081. After hours, go to the [Emergency Department at Harborview](#).
- Report injuries on the UW Online Accident Reporting System (OARS) at: <http://www.ehs.washington.edu/workplace/accident-and-injury-reporting>

Illness:

- If you develop signs or symptoms that you think may be related to your work with fish and/or research work, contact the [Employee Health Center](#).
- If you see your own provider, inform him/her that you work with fish and any other pertinent information regarding your research work. Inform Employee Health after seeing your healthcare provider.
- Report work-related illness on the UW Online Accident Reporting System (OARS) at: <http://www.ehs.washington.edu/workplace/accident-and-injury-reporting>

Allergies:

If you suspect you may be experiencing allergy symptoms, such as runny nose and sneezing (allergic rhinitis), irritation and tearing of eyes (allergic conjunctivitis), asthma, or skin rash (atopic dermatitis), contact the Employee Health Center. Those who already have asthma and/or other allergies are at an increased risk.

- People who are not able to eat fish because of an allergy may be more susceptible to an allergic reaction from touching fish, although this is uncommon.

References:

- UW Research and Occupational Health webpage: <https://www.ehs.washington.edu/research-lab/research-occupational-health>
- University of California Davis Zoonosis Information by Species webpage: <http://safetyservices.ucdavis.edu/ps/occh/acuohp/pem/zis>
- Washington State University Zoonotic Diseases webpage: <https://iacuc.wsu.edu/zoonotic-diseases/>
- U.S. Air Force Zoonotic Diseases webpage: <http://www.phsource.us/PH/ZD/index.htm>

Contacts:

- [UW Employee Health Center](#): 206-685-1026
- Harborview Employee Health Services: 206-744-3081
- For questions on AUMS: 206-221-7770
- For questions on UW Online Accident Reporting: 206-543-7388