



COVID-19 pandemic and animal research

NHMRC recognises that the COVID-19 pandemic may be affecting research involving animals, including delays to existing research projects, or new research relating to the pandemic that proposes to use animals.

The state and territory governments have regulatory responsibility for animal welfare including the care and use of animals for scientific purposes.

The [Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes, 2013](#) (8th edition) provides details about the responsibilities of institutions, animal ethics committee (AECs), investigators, animal carers and all people involved in the care and use of animals. Institutions are responsible for ensuring that the care and use of animals complies with the Code (Clause 2.1.1). Institutional responsibilities include the provision of guidelines for animal care and use, including actions required for unexpected adverse events and emergencies (Clause 2.1.5 [v] [d]). Actions required will differ between institutions. Matters for consideration include:¹

- the safety of all involved (Clauses 2.1.5 [iv]; 2.1.7 [i] [c]; 2.1.8 [vii]; 2.5.15 [xv])
- the wellbeing, care and monitoring of animals that continue to be used when the availability of an adequate number of staff may be adversely affected (Clauses 2.1.5 [ii]; 2.1.8 [iv]; 2.4.18; 2.5.15)
- provisions for animals that will no longer be required because of amendments or deferral of currently approved projects and activities (Clause 3.4)
- changes to animal breeding programs to avoid or minimise the production of excess animals because of amendments or deferral of currently approved projects and activities (Clause 1.27)
- the conduct of quorate AEC meetings through the use of videoconferencing and web-conferencing or, in special circumstances, teleconferencing (Clause 2.2.26 [ii])
- approval, in advance, for the immediate use of animals, if required, for investigation of the diagnosis or treatment of COVID-19 (Clause 2.1.5 [v] [e])
- processes for amendments or deferral for currently approved projects and activities (Clauses 2.2.23; 2.2.32)
- processes for urgent approvals for new projects and activities to investigate the cause, diagnosis or treatment of COVID-19, which must be considered at a quorate meeting of the AEC (Clauses 2.2.25 and 2.2.26)
- work health and safety considerations when planning new projects, including the feasibility and ethical acceptability of conducting the project; e.g. if the availability of investigators to conduct the work may be adversely affected and the availability of investigators to monitor animals that are used may be compromised (Clauses 1.15; 2.4.8 [xxi]); 2.7.4 [xxii] and [xxiii]).

Further information about COVID-19 impacts is available on [NHMRC's website](#).

¹ Note that references to clauses in the Code are not exhaustive.