

Guidelines for Animal Medical Record Keeping and Transfer of Records Between NIH Intramural Animal Facilities

Purpose:

Medical records are a required part of a veterinary care program, as outlined in both the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals* and the *Animal Welfare Act and Regulations*. These records document the care provided to each animal and support communication among veterinarians, animal care staff, and research personnel. This guideline focuses specifically on medical recordkeeping for USDA-regulated species, with particular emphasis on non-rodent animals(1, 2).

Record components may be kept in a variety of locations, including written records, computerized records, or research records. The choice of storage method depends on the operational needs and preferences of the parties involved. It is essential that all relevant parties have access to and can review these records. This includes veterinary staff, research personnel, as well as Institute/Center Animal Care and Use Committee (IC ACUC). Provided that accessibility is ensured for these groups, any storage location is considered acceptable.

Record Keeping:

- Individual medical records will be created upon receipt of USDA-regulated, non-rodent species to NIH. For animals born at NIH, the birth and early medical data may be grouped with the mother's medical record. An individual record for the offspring should be started as early as possible but no later than weaning or when an animal is enrolled on a study.
- Medical records will be maintained in a manner that adequately communicates pertinent medical information to any veterinarian or other relevant parties reviewing the record. At a minimum, medical records typically contain the following components as described by the American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine position statement on medical records(3):
 1. Institute and Principal Investigator, Animal Study Proposal (ASP) number
 2. Animal identification number or group, date of birth or age, and sex. If a permanent ID is not assigned, a physical description including identifying markings is acceptable;
 3. Clinical information including results of physical examinations, behavior of the animal and notations regarding observed abnormalities, illnesses and/or injuries;
 4. Immunizations and other prophylactic treatments and procedures as appropriate for the species;
 5. Documentation of diagnostic tests and results following interpretation;
 6. Reference to research interventions, where appropriate;
 7. Treatment prescribed and provided, along with the clinical response and any follow-up required;
 8. Surgery, anesthesia, analgesia and peri-/post-operative care;
 9. Control of pain and distress;
 10. Documentation of euthanasia or other disposition;
 11. Documentation of necropsy findings, if indicated.
- All entries in the medical record will be dated, indicate the originator of the entry and be legible to someone other than the writer/author.

Consideration should be given to including a "Master Problem List" which itemizes ongoing medical conditions and research manipulations that have a long-standing impact on the animal's health.

Transfer of Records:

- The original record or a complete, legible copy (paper or electronic) will be sent with the animal when it is permanently transferred between NIH facilities or outside institutions. A truncated copy containing a summary of recent health information and treatments may accompany animals temporarily transferred between facilities for imaging or surgical procedures.
- Record should include any importation documentation, other regulatory documentation and vendor information
- If the animal is moved outside of the facility (for example, due to permanent transfer or death), documentation that the animal has been removed from the facility is placed into the animal's record.
- If the receiving facility received what it considers to be an incomplete animal record, it is their responsibility to contact the sending facility to obtain missing components of the record.

Archiving Medical Records:

- When an animal is euthanized (or upon death) while on study, the animal's complete medical record must be archived. Copies may be maintained in the animal facility or in a centralized office or storage space, so long as they are accessible to IC staff for the duration consistent with medical record disposition.
- If desired, hard copies of medical records may be scanned in and stored in an unalterable electronic format e.g., pdf or image file. A method for retrieving scanned records must be in place.

Medical Records Disposition:

- Medical records should be kept at a duration consistent with [NIH Manual Chapter 1743: Managing Federal Records](#), the [NIH Record Scheduling System](#) (RSS) schedule item 04-202, and any other applicable regulations or laws. Individual ICs may set additional requirements in coordination with the NIH Records Management Office(4, 5).

References:

1. National Research Council. Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals. 8th ed. Washington DC2011.
2. United States Department of Agriculture. USDA Blue Book: Animal Welfare Act and Animal Welfare Regulations USDA2022 [Available from: <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/media/document/17164/file>.
3. American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine. Medical Records for Animals Used in Research, Teaching, and Testing [updated 9/30/2020. Available from: https://aalascraftcms.blob.core.windows.net/cms-images/ACLAM/About/Position-Statements/position_medical-records-2020.pdf.
4. NIH Office of Management Assessment. 1743 - Managing Federal Records: NIH Policy Manual; 2021 [Available from: <https://policymanual.nih.gov/1743>.
5. NIH Office of Management. NIH Records Scheduling System (RSS): National Institutes of Health, Office of Management; 2026 [Available from: <https://records.nih.gov/home>.

Approved – 05/11/2011

Revised – 10/26/2016, 6/26/2019, 12/09/2020, 05/05/2023 (administrative revision), 12/13/2023, 08/26/2026