The University of Texas at Austin
Office of Research Support and Compliance
Office of the Vice President for Research

Guidelines for the Use of Chemical Depilatory Agents on Laboratory Animals
The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee

These guidelines have been written to assist faculty, staff, and students in performing vertebrate animal procedures in a humane manner and complying with pertinent regulatory requirements. Under some circumstances deviations from these procedures may be indicated but such variances must be approved in advance by the IACUC.

This document provides information to researchers who use chemical depilatory agents in order to remove hair on animals used for research, teaching, or other purposes at the University of Texas at Austin. It is organized into three sections:

Section A – Background Information
Section B – Use of Chemical Depilatory Agents
Section C – References and Acknowledgements

Section A – Background Information

Chemical depilatory agents (e.g. Nair, Veet, etc.) may be used on animals designated for IACUC approved procedures, including but not limited to surgery, imaging, blood collection, or routine cleaning of cranial implants. An advantage of using a depilatory is its ease of use in areas that are difficult to shave; however, researchers should take precautions when using depilatories in order to ensure the health and well-being of the animal. Application of depilatories should be in accordance with the manufacturer's directives.

Section B – Use of Chemical Depilatory Agents

Appropriate hair removal is often best performed when the animal is anesthetized, although that is not always possible. In the instance that the animal cannot be anesthetized, it should be properly restrained. The depilatory may be applied directly to the animal's hair/fur, or the researcher may shave or clip the area of interest prior to application. Special care should be taken to prevent clipper burn. A thin, solid layer of the depilatory should be applied to the area of interest using a glove or cotton swab. When using depilatory cream within one centimeter of the eyes (e.g. a rodent cranial procedure) the eyes should be protected with a sterile petrolatum ophthalmic ointment (e.g., Puralube) prior to applying the depilatory. The depilatory may be left on the animal for up to 10 minutes, depending on the species and region of the body. Researchers must work to identify the minimum time period that will provide good hair clearing without signs of skin irritation. The researcher should set a timer once the depilatory is applied, and animals should not be left unattended during the hair removal process. Once the contact time has been reached, the depilatory should be promptly wiped off using warm water and a cloth or gauze pad. Researchers should take care to ensure all of the depilatory has been removed. If the depilatory is left on the animal's skin for too long, it can cause chemical burns, severe discomfort, or risk for inadvertent ingestion during grooming. The depilatory should be immediately removed if the animal shows signs of distress, discomfort, or adverse reactions. In these instances, the researcher should consult a UT Austin veterinarian to see if additional treatment is required. If additional hair remains after the first application and removal of the depilatory, then the area should be dried thoroughly and the process may be repeated once. If hair remains after conducting the process a second time, then a UT Austin veterinarian should be contacted to discuss appropriate next steps.

Section C – References and Acknowledgements

This guideline contains information adapted from

- John Hopkins University Animal Care and Use Committee, "Hair Removal on Rodents," available at: http://web.jhu.edu/animalcare/policies/Hair%20Removal%20on%20Rodents.doc
- University of Michigan Animal Care and Use Program, "Up in the Air About Removing Hair? Follow These Best Practices for Using Nair®," available at: https://animalcare.umich.edu/announcements/air-about-removing-hair-follow-these-best-practices-using-nair%C2%AE

Hankenson, F. Claire. Critical Care Management for Laboratory Mice and Rats. Vol. 1, CRC Press, 2014.