This document provides information to be used when planning and performing procedures using vertebrate animals for research, teaching, or other purposes at The University of Texas at Austin (University). These requirements are not limited to Animal Resources Center (ARC) animal care staff, nor to animals housed in the Animal Resources Center. This guideline is applicable to all locations where vertebrate animals are maintained for biomedical research as part of University research and/or teaching projects. It is organized into five sections:

Section A – Requirements
Section B – Reporting for Colonies in Centrally-Managed Locations
Section C – Reporting for ARC-managed non-centrally located facilities
Section D – Reporting for Satellite Locations
Section E – Notification of the IACUC
Section F – Acknowledgements

Section A – Requirements

1. Trained personnel who are familiar with the species must check all animals daily for signs of disease or illness. (Source: The Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, National Research Council, 2011.)

2. The requirement for daily observations includes weekend, holidays, emergency closures and shutdown periods.

3. Performance of health checks must be documented daily in a room log or tracking sheet by the person performing these checks. Initials should be used, rather than just checking a box.

4. If sick or injured animals are found either during routine daily checks or while other duties are being performed in an animal area, the appropriate persons must be promptly notified. Emergency contact information should be posted in animal housing areas to facilitate prompt reporting.

5. In addition to spontaneous disease conditions, monitoring and reporting must also include unanticipated consequences or adverse events associated with research use, including, but not limited to, surgery, drug treatment, genetic manipulations, handling and restraint, mechanical failures in environmental control systems, and transport or shipping (including animals that are injured or dead upon arrival). Unanticipated mortality, morbidity, pain, distress, or other complications because of experimental procedures in addition to or more than that described in the approved protocol must also be reported to the ARC veterinary staff. See section E. for additional IACUC reporting requirements.
6. All treatment of research animals with drugs or chemical agents (including antibiotics, parasite treatments, aquatic dips, etc.) must be either directly approved by the IACUC via an approved animal use protocol or an ARC veterinarian. The most common way for pre-authorization to be obtained is for the treatment to be included in an approved IACUC protocol. Pre-authorization for typical colony management treatments (e.g., quarantine treatments for newly acquired fish or treatment for common spontaneous health conditions in a satellite area) can also be obtained by including specific treatment plans in a satellite area standard operating procedure (SOP) that is reviewed and approved by an ARC veterinarian and included as an attachment in the approved animal use protocol. If a medical treatment or a surgical correction (e.g., re-suturing an incision that dehisced) appears necessary but isn't covered by an approved protocol, then a veterinary consultation with an ARC vet must be obtained prior to acting.

Section B – Reporting for Colonies in the ARC Building

Multi-copy morbidity/mortality reporting forms are to be used to report health issues. The form should be completely filled out, and the cardboard copy should be placed in the cage cardholder or otherwise secured to the cage/tank/pen to identify the animal. The remaining 2 paper sheets should be turned in to the veterinary technician inbox on the first floor of the ARC, next to the ARC communications whiteboard. Alternatively, you may email a picture of the illness card to veterinary staff at (vetstaff@austin.utexas.edu). If any animal appears to be in immediate need of attention, an on-call veterinarian must be contacted directly by calling 512 471-4145.

Section C – Reporting for Other ARC-managed Facilities

Multi-copy morbidity/mortality reporting forms are to be used. The form should be completely filled out, and the cardboard copy should be placed in the cage cardholder or otherwise secured to the cage/tank/pen to identify the animal. A picture of the card should be sent to the ARC veterinary staff at (vetstaff@austin.utexas.edu). If the animal appears to be in immediate need of attention, the on call Clinical Veterinarian must be contacted at 512 471-4145.

Section D- Reporting for Satellite Locations

Each satellite must have a plan to assure prompt reporting of animal health issues or research complications to a knowledgeable person who has authority to make decisions and access to the appropriate means of alleviating pain or distress. In some cases, the investigator or trained staff may be experts in the care of a particular species. Unless specific action plans are pre-approved in an IACUC-approved animal care and use protocol or an IACUC approved SOP, however the veterinary staff must be consulted whenever animals are in need of medical care due to illness or injury (see #6 under Section A above). In those situations, satellite facilities must report morbidity/mortality to the ARC by emailing vetstaff@austin.utexas.edu. The report must include the protocol number, species, specific location of animal(s) (building, room, ID on cage or tank), lab point of contact, and the health concern. For urgent matters, personnel must also directly contact the Clinical Veterinarian on call as described in Sections A. and B., above.

Section E – Notification of the IACUC

Adverse events are when there are outcomes involving unanticipated (not in the approved protocol) events that cause direct harm to animals or personnel. Adverse events include debilitation, animal death, illness, distress, or trauma that exceeds normal expectations as described in the approved protocol. Examples include increased or unexpected morbidity, mortality, facility, or weather-associated events (e.g., HVAC or power failure, flooding, fire) that negatively impact the welfare of an animal. IACUC and veterinary staff are available to assist investigators in
determining if an adverse event is reportable on an individual basis. Adverse events are reported to the IACUC on the Adverse Event Reporting Form. Contact the IACUC@austin.utexas.edu for questions regarding adverse event reporting.

Section F – Acknowledgements

This document contains content that was adapted from materials obtained from the ARC guideline entitled “Veterinary Care, Health Checks, and Illness Reporting, 2/24/09 V2.”