



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

ANIMAL RESOURCES CENTER

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Importing special rodent strains to UT-Austin from a noncommercial source 9/28/21

1) The strain I need is not available from a commercial vendor. Can I receive mice directly from another institution?

Yes, you certainly can. The Animal Resources Center (ARC) frequently assists UT investigators in obtaining new and unique strains from other research institutions. Access to these unique animals is extremely valuable for the ongoing research programs in nearly every department that uses animals at UT. However, each shipment from an "atypical" source poses a health risk because it is possible to import *new diseases* along with the new mice. Many transgenic and knockout strains have been licensed and obtained for production by commercial rodent vendors or centralized repositories (e.g., Jackson Laboratories), so individuals attempting to transfer mice from an atypical source should first be sure that no commercial source exists. Commercially available mice might be more expensive than those available as a "gift" from other laboratories, but this savings is far outweighed by the potential costs to individual investigators and the university as a whole that would be associated with a disease outbreak in our main colonies. Quarantine charges will also add to the overall expense involved in importing animals from noncommercial sources and will involve a period of isolation upon arrival, during which research use is not possible.

2) What types of facilities do we consider to be "noncommercial"?

A noncommercial source (or vendor) is a business or institution which may possess specific mouse strains but which is not primarily in the business of producing and selling large volumes of animals and is not one of our pre-approved rodent vendors. Most universities, research foundations/institutes, biotechnology companies, pharmaceutical corporations, and some government-funded resources (e.g. most NIH colonies) do not have the high degree of biosecurity, health monitoring and quality assurance in place that is provided by our approved vendors. Commercial vendors take extremely strict precautions to assure that the production, packaging and delivery of rodents excludes opportunities for contamination of the mice that are delivered to us. NOTE: In recent years, a number of federally supported rodent strain repositories have been established as part of the Mutant Mouse Regional Resource Center (MMRRC) initiative. Shipments from these specialized resources will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to determine if they require quarantine or other special precautions, but in many cases quarantine can be waived.

3) How do I order from a noncommercial source?

Each lab that wishes to import animals from a noncommercial source is responsible for communications with the outside institution. This includes the initial request that animals be sent, a request for health information, the follow-up negotiations over the numbers of animals to be transferred, what genotypes should be sent, etc. In addition, the lab must sort out any MTAs or other research agreements before

requesting the import. Once the preliminary agreements are in place, approval by the ARC is required before import occurs, and the ARC can provide assistance in finalizing the shipping details.

To initiate the approval process for an incoming animal shipment from a noncommercial vendor there are three steps:

- a) A UT laboratory representative must submit an animal order request that covers the import. This is the same online order system that is used for commercial animal orders and can be accessed by using the link provided on this page: <https://research.utexas.edu/arc/services/animal-ordering/>. Fill out the requested information (naming the noncommercial source as the vendor) and submit. Take note of the Requisition Number provided by the system, which will be needed for the third step.
- b) A laboratory representative must request recent relevant disease monitoring reports from the institution that will be sending the animals. A request for pre-shipment colony health information is a very routine procedure, so there should be no issues with the sending institution, but if assistance is required you can contact the ARC veterinary group.
- c) Once the requisition number for the import request and the colony health information has been obtained, this information should be forwarded to the ARC Senior Clinical Veterinarian for approval. See above for contact information.

After the import has been given veterinary approval, the ARC Supervisor will be available to help coordinate the final arrangements with the sending institution. However, each noncommercial order is a bit different, and the UT research lab may need to provide more information or become involved in further communications with the sender regarding the order.

The ARC has accounts with a number of the preferred laboratory animal courier companies. UT labs can contact the ARC Supervisor if they are interested in using one of these institutional accounts to pay for the shipping, after which the ARC will bill the lab for reimbursement. See above for contact information.

4) I'll be visiting the outside lab I want animals from. Can't I just bring the mice back with me?

Transfer of animals from one institution to another must be very carefully coordinated for legal reasons and to minimize the potential transfer of disease. Disease outbreaks have been linked to "unofficial" transfers in cases where animals were hand-carried into facilities without proper shipment and quarantine.

5) What happens after the shipment is approved?

The ARC Supervisor will finalize the shipping arrangements with the other institution and will communicate the expected delivery date to the importing lab and the ARC staff so that they will be ready to receive the animals. It is very important to make sure shipment doesn't occur before ARC approval for the import is given, because animals that arrive without prior approval are considered "suspect" and may be subject to a longer quarantine period, diversion to a different facility or other precautions that restrict their availability for use (including euthanasia in a worst case scenario). To eliminate the possibility of another institution shipping animals to UT prematurely, individuals who are requesting animals from a noncommercial source should NOT provide the shipping address or give a verbal approval to ship until after ARC veterinary approval has been granted.

7) Will quarantine be required? What happens during the quarantine period? How long is quarantine?

Quarantine is occasionally waived for animals being brought in to the low-biosecurity conventional areas of the campus animal facilities, but it will be required in most cases when animals are to be housed in barrier or SPF locations. In most cases, quarantine is finished and animals are transferred to an appropriate permanent housing area within 3-4 weeks of arrival. However, this schedule can vary since it is affected by holiday periods, the need to perform confirmatory tests on suspect results, and other factors. Noninvasive testing (fecal collection and sampling for external parasites) will be performed directly on the incoming animals, and minimally-invasive testing (collecting a drop of blood) may be performed on a small percentage of the shipment. This regimen minimizes the impact of testing on the incoming shipment, which is often composed of a small number of extremely valuable mice.

In some cases quarantine isolation involves a group of incoming shipments that appear to be compatible that are quarantined in a shared quarantine room. In these cases, quarantine release may be delayed if any testing performed on any shipment in that quarantine room shows evidence of potential contamination.

8) The animals look fine and my collaborator says they are "clean". Why are animals from other institutions quarantined?

Although health surveillance information from the sending institution is used in order to determine how much risk of contamination is associated with a noncommercial shipment, this does not remove the need for quarantine. There are three main reasons why quarantine is indicated:

- a) the monitoring profiles from noncommercial vendors are not able to guarantee the absence of disease contamination in the colony of origin
- b) there is a potential that contamination can occur during packing and shipping even if the animals originated from a clean area
- c) there is a wide variation in the specific agents each institution monitors during testing. We need to specifically verify the presence or absence of those agents that our facility has chosen to monitor and exclude.

9) Can any experimental work and/or breeding begin with mice while they are in quarantine?

It is important to strictly limit access to areas that may be contaminated. Users must get approval from the ARC Senior Clinical Veterinarian and make arrangements with the ARC Supervisor to be given access to the room to inspect the shipments after arrival in order to verify what was sent. All persons taking advantage of this limited access privilege should be aware of the potential risks of cross-contamination and should consult with the veterinary staff to plan entry accordingly.

Pregnant or nursing dams cannot be imported without approval from the ARC Senior Clinical Veterinarian.

PLEASE NOTE: No active experimental manipulations or sampling (e.g., for genotyping) should begin during quarantine, and animals must not be removed from the room for any reason other than euthanasia. The only exception is that in some very specific cases, animals can be removed from quarantine for nonsurvival studies if these terminal procedures can be performed in an isolated area without contaminating other animals. This type of use can only begin if a written plan describing the precautions used to minimize cross-contamination during transport and experimental manipulations has been approved by the veterinary staff. The ARC Supervisor responsible for the area must also be notified of any terminal use of quarantined animals, and proper disposal methods must be used to avoid cross-contamination in the facility.

Breeding in quarantine cannot be accommodated in most cases because it greatly increases the space needed to contain quarantined mice, and more importantly, the introduction of naïve animals into this area via transfer or birth decreases the reliability of quarantine testing procedures and can unnecessarily amplify any infectious agent that is present.

10) What if my animals are found to be "dirty?"

If animals are presumed to be contaminated based on the health information provided by the institution sending the animals, or are found to be contaminated based on our own testing, they may need to be diverted to a dedicated containment area. The lab requesting the animals will need to work with the ARC to develop a plan for subsequent rederivation and further quarantine.