

Guidelines for the Group Housing of Rodents

The 8th edition of the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals* (the *Guide*) recommends that all social species be housed in groups to allow for appropriate social interactions, which are essential to development and well-being. Rodents are considered social animals and should be housed in social groups. When housing animals in social groups, adequate space should be provided for the animals.

The NCI at Frederick Animal Care and Use Committee [ACUC] recommends that all social animals be group housed whenever possible. [Guidance for the Housing Density of Mice and Rats](#) provides guidance on the acceptable number of animals to be group housed and must be followed unless justification is provided to and approved by the ACUC. However, the ACUC understands there are instances when animals must be single housed. Rodents that are singly housed must be provided additional enrichment, such as a plastic hut or additional nesting material. To assist with determining when it is acceptable to singly house animals, the ACUC provides the following guidance:

- If rodents need to be housed singly for experimental purposes a justification must be provided to the ACUC for review and approval. The justification must include the instances where rodents must be single housed, the rationale for that single housing and the expected duration of single housing.
- In addition to scientific reasons for single housing there are veterinary and logistical reasons which the ACUC authorizes for all protocols to support the well-being of all housed animals. These are expressly defined and approved by this guideline and do not require individual protocol review and approval. Specifically these instances are:
 - *Provision of veterinary care as directed by LAM staff and continuing until the animal has returned to a health status no longer requiring isolation (wound healed, treatments completed, veterinary release)*
 - *Incompatibility among the group [i.e. fighting] resulting in the need to isolate one or more animals to protect the well-being of the remaining cohort*
 - *Single housing during breeding cycle to specifically include single housing of the male when separated from breeding females and single housing of the female when parturition is imminent*
 - *Last animal remaining in an experimental group*
 - *Animals recovering from surgery or other experimental procedures where co-housing could result in injuries inflicted by cage mates – in these cases the mice will be returned to a group housing status as soon as they have recovered to the level that prevents injury by cage mates.*
 - *An experimental group or weaned litter consisting of a single animal due to genotype availability.*