

Policy on solitary housing of mice and rats

This is a document from the Animal welfare body Leiden (AWB) written together with the animal facility (ARF).

Objective

This document aims to provide clarity about the solitary housing policy of mice and rats in experiments.

Introduction

In the 'Dierproevenbesluit' (Animal Experiments Order) of 26 November (art. 7) the Experiments on Animals Act (*Wod*) refers to housing guidelines. These guidelines are included in Annex III of EU directive 2010/63, which stipulates that naturally social animals have to be socially housed. This means that by default the housing of mice and rats consists of groups of 2 or more animals. Nevertheless, housing of mice and rats in groups is not always the best option per se. Social housing may be more or less well suited depending on the age, sex, genetic background additionally the animal history. The *Wod* (art. 7 of the Animal Experiments Order) provides the option to deviate from housing in groups for scientific reasons, or for reasons relating to animal welfare and/or animal health.

Below we explain when solitary housing is considered and what steps need to be taken.

Solitary housing

Solitary housing as part of the experiment

If solitary housing is part of the experiment because of scientific or practical reasons, this should be described in your project application. The information should include the justification for solitary housing, the maximal duration and the degree to which the presence of other animals of the same species can be detected by for example smell or sound. The discomfort associated with solitary housing is assessed per case in consultation with the AWB and the designated veterinarian, which subsequently will be taken into account in the ethical evaluation of the project by the DEC (Animal Ethics Committee). Moreover, prior to the execution of the experiment, solitary housing as part of the experimental procedures must be described in the research plan.

Unforeseen solitary housing during the experiment

Solitary housing of animals could also occur as a result of unforeseen circumstances during the execution of an experiment for example by separation as a result of aggressive behaviour, intercurrent diseases or unexpected animal loss during the experiment. If applicable, the following steps will be taken;

- As soon as an animal is housed separately by the animal care taker, the researcher will be informed.
- In case of aggressive behaviour or intercurrent diseases the researcher and animal caretaker can notify the designated veterinarian directly.
- If due to the solitary housing the experiment is no longer in accordance with the agreements of the research plan, the researcher will discuss the housing with the AWB ([PDC-LUMC-lvD@Lumc.nl](mailto:lvD@Lumc.nl)).

Breeding and stock animals

In breeding and stock for animals which are used in experiments at a later phase solitary housing will be prevented as much as possible. Combining animals at weaning from different nests however derived from the same breeding line, the same sex and age is standard.

The ARF will register in the registration system a start date when solitary housing could not be prevented. Solo and the date will be entered in the remarks field on the animal label. When



rehousing with another animal is possible the end date and 'put together' is marked in the discomfort field. The researcher is informed via the label and the registration system and can include this in the design of the experiment. In the OZP where the use of the animals is described solitary housing can be explained in the table on housing and care.