

## Procedures for Rat Bites and Scratches

### Prevention

In the research laboratory or animal holding facility one of the most important things you can do to prevent bites and scratches is to learn the correct methods of handling the species that you intend to work with. Protective equipment, such as heavy gloves and long-sleeved laboratory coats limit injury to the hands and arms. You can contact the staff in the Animal Care Facility or Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) for guidance.



### Emergency Response and First Aid

- 1 Secure the animal if it is still under your control.
- 2 Notify your supervisor or colleague that you have been bitten or scratched.
- 3 As soon as possible **wash the wound with plenty of soap** (preferably antiseptic soap, such as Betadine®) and water for at least **15 minutes**.



- 4 If wound is bleeding, cover with sterile gauze, non-sterile gauze or a paper towel. Sterile gauze is preferred.
- 5 If the bite or scratch is severe, seek medical treatment. Call 911
- 6 As soon as possible, contact EHS so they can help you complete the required forms and conduct an investigation

### Zoonotic Agents and Risk Factors

Modern laboratory rats are bred to exclude all zoonotic agents. Therefore, there is limited concern for disease from these research rats. There is, however, always concern about *secondary infections* that can occur with bites and scratches. Common skin, intestinal, and soil bacteria present on you or the animal can infect the scratch or bite wound and cause these secondary infections. Historically, rats have been known to carry a bacterium that causes Rat-Bite Fever. However, these bacteria have not been found in laboratory rats for decades. There could be other risk factors if the animal was exposed to chemicals, pathogens or radiation.

**Call UMass Boston Public Safety @ 911**  
**University Health Services at 7-5660 (9AM-5PM)**  
**EHS (617) 287-5445**