SHEEP AND GOAT
Occupational Safety Information

General Safety Information for Sheep and Goat Handlers
The Safety Training Program for Animal Handlers is designed to inform individuals who are involved with the care and use of animals about potential hazards (e.g., zoonoses, allergies, injuries) associated with working with various animal species and to provide information as to how they may lessen these hazards (e.g., personal hygiene, personal protective equipment [PPE]).

Zoonotic Diseases of Sheep and Goats
Sheep and goats can carry organisms that may cause infection and disease in humans (zoonotic diseases, zoonoses). Exposure to these organisms can come through direct contact with the animal, or indirectly through contact with the animal’s feces or body fluids/secretions. In general, sheep and goats maintained in research/teaching facilities have routine health maintenance (e.g., vaccinations, deworming) and are closely monitored for disease. Therefore, the likelihood of disease transmission to humans is greatly reduced. People who handle sheep and goats should be aware of a number of important diseases that they may carry, which include: Rabies, Q-Fever (Coxiella burnetti), Contagious Ecthyma (Orf), Brucellosis, Anthrax, and gastro-intestinal diseases (e.g. Salmonellosis, Campylobacteriosis, E. coli 0157:H7), Giardia and Cryptosporidia. Some of these diseases may not produce observable signs of illness in the sheep and goats; therefore, if you handle sheep and goats or their wastes you must take appropriate precautions to prevent transmission of these infections. You can view more information on these agents and other agents at the following website: Occupational Health and Safety Program.

Injuries from Handling Sheep and Goats
Handling sheep and goats can be physically demanding. Injuries to people can occur as a result of sheep or goats running into them and/or knocking them over, lacerations, bites, back strain, and knee injuries associated with trying to restrain. Jumping is common in sheep and they can jump with enough force to break a handler’s leg, or high enough to strike a handler in the face. Butting is another defensive activity of sheep, and the rule of handling these animals is to never turn your back on the animal while in its pen. Goats are more difficult to handle than sheep or cattle. They do not flow through handling systems easily and when they are frightened they may lie down and pack in a corner, risking injury to other goats in the enclosure. The can also become aggressive towards each other and their defensive mechanisms are to ram or bite, which may also be used against humans. Other hazards in sheep or goat facilities that can injure handlers include: gates, chutes, and other hinged caging causing pinched fingers or bruising; overhanging objects; exposed nails or broken pen wire; electrical shock from hosing pens and walls where light and electrical sockets are not waterproof. Physical injuries such as back strain can occur from handling and restraining sheep and goats due to their size and strength. Individuals with pre-existing back problems may need assistance when catching and handling sheep or goats. It is essential that people who handle sheep or goats for research or teaching be provided with training in proper handling techniques in order to avoid injury to themselves or the animals, such specific handling and restraint techniques, and protective clothing requirements.
Allergic Reactions to Sheep and Goats

Allergic reactions in humans to sheep are rare. Proteins on the hair and skin flakes of goats can cause allergic reactions in some humans. The housing environment of sheep and goats may contain a number of allergens (e.g., grasses, pollens) that can cause allergic reactions in some people. The signs of allergies/allergic reactions may include sneezing, nasal stuffiness/congestion, itchy and watery eyes, and skin rash/itching. Contact dermatitis (itchy skin) can also occur when handling the wool of sheep.

How to Protect Yourself

Wash your Hands: The single most effective preventative measure that you can take is thorough, regular hand washing. You must wash your hands (and arms, if they are not covered) after handling sheep or goats. You should avoid touching your face, eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands or contaminated gloves. You must never eat, drink, smoke, or apply makeup in animal housing areas.

Wear PPE: When working with sheep and goats wear appropriate coveralls (long trousers, and, preferably, long sleeved shirts), closed-toe, sturdy footwear and other equipment as appropriate for the task (e.g., gloves, shin guards). Dust masks should be worn if you already have allergies, or if you are outside in dusty areas or if you are working with pigs in indoor facilities.

Seek Medical Attention Promptly: If you are injured on the job (e.g., bitten, knocked down, joint or arm/leg/foot/hand injuries) promptly report the accident to your supervisor even if it seems relatively minor. Clean all minor cuts and abrasions immediately with antibacterial soap, and then protect it from exposure to dirt and animal wastes or bodily fluids/secretions. For more serious injuries employees should report to EHSS for assessment and referral.

Tell Your Physician You Work with Sheep and Goats: Whenever you are ill, even if you are not certain that the illness is work-related, always mention to your physician that you work with sheep and/or goats. Many zoonotic diseases have flu-like symptoms and would not normally be suspected. Your physician needs this information to make an accurate diagnosis. Questions about personal human health should be answered by your physician.