

December 2017

## Daily Observation

The Animal Welfare Act regulations (9 C.F.R. §§ 2.33(b)(3), 2.40(b)(3)) require dealers, exhibitors, and research facilities to observe all animals daily to assess their health and well-being. This may be accomplished by someone other than the attending veterinarian if a mechanism of direct and frequent communication is in place to convey timely and accurate information on problems of animal health, behavior, and well-being to the attending veterinarian.

Daily observation of all animals is part of good husbandry practices. It is extremely important that dealers, exhibitors, and research facilities meet this requirement to detect possible problems, including disease and abnormal behavior. Early detection and treatment improves animal outcomes and can save time and money. For example, an animal observed with a small laceration or wound on the day the injury occurred may only require cleaning and minimal medication and treatment, while the same laceration observed several days later may be infected and require more extensive and expensive treatment with a higher risk to the animal's health and well-being.

**WHO.** Daily observation of animals may be carried out by either: (1) The attending veterinarian; or (2) someone other than the attending veterinarian, if the person is capable of assessing the health and well-being of the animal(s) and there is a mechanism of direct and frequent communication in place to keep the attending veterinarian informed.

**WHEN.** Generally, it is most effective to observe and assess an animal's health and well-being as a single and separate task, rather than combining it with other tasks or chores. If daily observations are combined with other tasks, the potential for missing something crucial increases, as the focus is on completing all of the tasks rather than observing the animal.

**HOW.** Observe each animal daily to assess its health and well-being. Carefully observe each animal from head to tail, including each part of its body and behavior, for abnormalities that may indicate a potential problem. Also, look at the feces, and discharge from the animal if there is any, for signs of abnormalities. Establish a consistent method for conducting your daily observations. We encourage facilities to consult with their attending veterinarian on how to perform daily observations of animals. Many facilities have found checklists and similar tools helpful for ensuring daily observations are consistent and effective in assessing animal health and well-being.

**WHAT.** Things to consider when conducting your observations (not limited to the following):

- Physical attributes:** How does the animal look? Are there any abnormalities? Consider handling the animal if safe and appropriate to do so. Not only will you be able to use touch as an observational tool, you will also promote social interactions and neurological well-being.



- **Body**
    - Is haircoat normal? Glossy or dull, hair loss?
    - Under or over weight? Can you see the ribs?
    - Itching? Scabbing? Lumps? Bumps? Parasites?
  - **Head**
    - Eyes – clear, discharge, winking or blinking excessively?
    - Ears/Nose – clean, discharge or buildup?
    - Mouth/Teeth/Gums - clean, buildup (tartar), bleeding or injuries?
  - **Limbs/Extremities**
    - Feet – Nails/Claws/Hooves proper length, wounds or abnormalities?
    - Joints – calluses, mobility, lameness?
- **Behavior:** Is the animal acting normal? Is the movement or gait normal? Is the animal lethargic or displaying behaviors consistent with sickness, stress, or boredom? Does the behavior change when you move closer or further from the animal? For example, does the animal act stoic and appear to be normal upon closer examination, but when walking away or from a distance the animal appears to have a limp or injury or displays different behavior.
- **Environment:** Is the animal's environment safe? Are environmental controls (temperature, humidity, shelter from elements) adequate for the species and the season?

Is the animal:

- Huddling or shivering due to cold?
  - Panting, or laying stretched out due to heat?
  - Food and water receptacles used or left alone?
    - Eating and drinking enough?
  - Elimination habit normal?
    - Loose or abnormal stools?
    - Vomit? Regurgitated food/water?
- **Animals under veterinary care:** Daily observation is required for all animals at the facility whether or not the animals are under veterinary care and/or treatment. However, when observing animals under veterinary care and/or treatment, it is important to observe how the treatment is progressing.

Consider the following:

- Is the treatment working? Is the animal's health improving, about the same, or worsening?
- When should you follow up with your attending veterinarian? If the animal's condition is worsening or you've completed treatment but the animal seems about the same, is it time to call the veterinarian with an update?
- What should you be documenting as part of your observation and treatment plan?



# Tech Note

Discussing the questions above with your attending veterinarian will help you to provide for the animal's health and well-being. Regularly review, discuss, and update your Program of Veterinary Care with your attending veterinarian to account for new guidance or treatment protocols.

### Facility Spotlight – Daily Observation in Practice:

Below are examples of some of the procedures and practices that have been developed and adopted by regulated facilities to ensure effective daily observation of animals.

- Daily observation should be done as a sole task with complete focus on the animals – separate from the rest of the work and daily chores.
- Keep records of daily observations and contacts with the attending veterinarian – including animal identification, date, what the problem was, method of contact to the attending veterinarian (phone, text, email, visit), and the attending veterinarian's advice.
- Capture information on daily observations, including photographs and videos, using a tablet or smartphone that can immediately connect to a main office computer for review.
- Create a system to log daily observation recordings, such as a notebook/binder or spreadsheet/database.
- Look at every animal and enclosure at the beginning of each day. Make a list of what needs to be fixed, repaired, clipped, moved, medicated, etc. This creates a "to-do list" for the day for planning and maintenance in addition to accomplishing daily observations.
- Provide training to all staff with responsibility for conducting daily observation on recognizing physical and behavioral concerns, and, the established protocol within the facility for documenting and communicating with the attending veterinarian.
- Monitor appetite and diet consumption as potential early indicators of concern.
- Include weekly weight checks in the observation program.

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