Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC)
Policy on Rodent Toe Clipping

The purpose of this policy is to describe the proper toe clipping technique and the conditions in which it is appropriate. According to the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals* (p75), “toe-clipping, as a method of identification of small rodents, should be used only when no other individual identification method is feasible and should be performed only on altricial neonates.”

**Standards:**

- Toe clipping must be **scientifically justified** in an approved IACUC protocol. Adequate justification does not include cost, convenience or lack of formal training.
- Toe clipping, as a method of identification, should only be used when no other identification methods are feasible and should be combined with genotyping.
- **Toe clips must be performed on or before 10 days of age** with the ideal time being between 5-7 days of age when the toes are separate and the bone not calcified.
- Toe clipping beyond 10 days of age is considered painful and is not an acceptable procedure for either identification or genotyping. If tissue for genotyping is required beyond 10 days of age, alternative methods of collecting tissues should be considered. Contact DLAM veterinarians for additional information.
- The IACUC allows toe clips on a maximum of 4 toes and no more than 2 toes per foot. Any identification numbering system should be designed to minimize the number of toes clipped per animal.
- The hallux (also referred to as dew claw or thumb) may not be cut as this may decrease the rodent’s grasping ability.

**Procedures:**

- Obtain adequate training from Principal Investigator (PI) and/or Laboratory Animal Coordinator (LAC).
- Restrain the animal for the minimum amount of time required for the procedure.
- With a sharp instrument, remove the toe(s) at the most distal joint of the toe (i.e., remove the last phalangeal [toe] bone).
- Sharp scissors are recommended for toe-clipping in neonatal rodents.
- Instruments must be clean and disinfected initially, and blade surfaces should be cleared of debris and wiped with 70% alcohol between animals.
- Apply pressure to the exposed tissue with gauze or other clean and absorbable material to ensure hemostasis. Monitor animals continuously until bleeding has stopped.
- During the procedure, the neonatal rodents should be handled gently and then placed back with the mother as quickly as possible.