[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:US-DeptOfVeteransAffairs-Seal.svg)**IACUC Training Exercise #1 – 2020 (Virtual AAALAC Site Visit)**

The following exercise may be useful in stimulating discussion regarding compliance with PHS Policy and VA Handbook 1200.07. To facilitate discussion, the exercise may be distributed to the IACUC members prior to a meeting and then discussed at the IACUC meeting.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, many accredited units have delayed their AAALAC site visits. In recent months, site visits have resumed as traditional on-site visits, hybrid visits (mostly virtual with an on-site animal facility review), and all virtual. This exercise will focus on factors to consider in determining, if a virtual site visit is right for your program. Points to consider are outlined in the table below:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Question** | **Virtual Site Visit**  **Likely** | **Virtual Site Visit**  **Not Likely** |
| **What species of animals are maintained?** | Rodents,  non-marine aquatic species, and  other species not regulated by the USDA AWAR | USDA regulated species, particularly cats, dogs, and nonhuman primates |
| **What is the nature of the work conducted?** | Less invasive studies with lower potential for pain and distress (i.e. breeding, terminal surgery, some nutritional studies, etc.) | Invasive studies with high potential for pain and distress (e.g. toxicology, infectious disease, traumatic brain injury, etc.) |
| **What are the local COVID-19 requirements for staff and visitors to be on-site at your station?** | Multi-step process to gain site access applies to staff and visitors:  Only mission-critical staff are on-site.  Complete screening questionnaire regarding COVID-19 symptoms, exposure, travel, etc.  Negative COVID-19 test,  Compelling reason to be on-site.  Leadership approval with restrictions (i.e. your office only for a given day). Must wear mask unless alone in your office. | Not a COVID-19 hotspot.  Varies with job duties but remote working restrictions have been eased.  Business-related visitors allowed if planned in advance and are able to meet local requirements. |
| **If on-site access is allowed, what are the policies on maintaining social distancing?** | Masks are mandatory.  Room occupancy dictated by size and function: 3-4 people in a conference room; 1 person in a small animal holding room. | Masks wearing and social distancing are practiced but generally no room occupancy restrictions. |
| **What is your program’s recent history with AAALAC?** | Suggestions for Improvement and  no recent mandatory corrections. | Frequent mandatory corrections; placed on probation at the last site visit. |

If most or all of your answers were in the “Virtual Site Visit Likely” column, the decision to pursue the virtual site visit route should be made in consultation with your station’s leadership, medical experts, and IACUC. If everyone agrees that a virtual site visit is the preferred option, a straightforward and complete program description (PD) with a cover letter clearly outlining the local circumstances and site visit preference should be submitted to AAALAC on or before the PD submission deadline for the trimester of your station’s site visit. If AAALAC concurs, a virtual site visit will be conducted.

A virtual site visit may seem like less work but that is not necessarily the case. The lead site visitor may invite a board delegate as well as an ad hoc site visitor to participate. If your site visit is typically a one day or less event; the virtual visit might be spread over two half days. Document review will be substantially increased, the site visitors will request all of the documents they usually review when they are on-site plus, they may ask for photographs of safety signage and six months of veterinary medical records and room logs. You may find it helpful to review the AAALAC FAQs because you and the IACUC will need to be prepared to answer questions relevant to the FAQs.

Conducting a virtual animal facility tour requires preparation, you have to remember that the site visitors can only see what the camera sees. The tour will go smoother, if you decide in advance the path the animal facility tour will take. A predetermined path is especially important if the narrator and the camera operator are two different people. The site visitors will want to see the animals but they will also want a close-up view of room entry requirements, safety signage, controlled substance logs, etc. A practice run of the virtual animal facility tour will make the real one better.

Wishing you, good luck with your station’s AAALAC site visit.