

Updated Policy and Procedures Regarding Minors in Labs

The participation of minors in research work is an important experiential element for some and should be accommodated where appropriate; but under-18 young people wishing to gain experience in various research settings may be exposed to inherent research risks. These potential exposures to chemicals, biologics or radioactivity pose a risk to the individual and the university. Occupational Safety & Environmental Health (OSEH) has updated policy/procedures on “Minors in Labs” in order to provide research PIs with a more direct process for arranging to have minors participate in their laboratory research operations (<http://www.oseh.umich.edu/minors.html>).

This new policy is not meant to address minors who participate in university-sanctioned, short-term, “research opportunity” programs. Instead, it is focused upon minors who make private arrangements for research experience with individual researchers they are acquainted with – or through other university facilitators – in order to gain research experience over the course of weeks or even months. The policy recognizes that UM Medical Center has an orientation policy and procedures already in place for volunteers, whether they plan to be active in the clinical setting or a research setting. The UMMC orientation allows individuals to receive red volunteer ID badges. It goes beyond that and identifies prudent steps that must be followed in order to protect the interests of the volunteer, their parents/guardians, and the university.

The “Minors in Labs” policy is focused on ensuring that the minor and their parents are aware of the risks that are inherent in modern research laboratories and that all the necessary steps are taken to reduce or eliminate those risks to the greatest extent possible. Awareness of the risks is documented through the use of specific disclosure forms, and risk-reduction is achieved through rigorous, documented training on the part of the minor. Laboratory Directors are responsible for filing the necessary disclosures and permissions with their departmental chairs’ offices for internal review and filing purposes. OSEH is available with technical assistance on any specific safety or training aspects involving minors in labs. If there are any questions concerning this policy and procedures, please contact OSEH directly at 734-763-6973.