



JOINT STATEMENT FROM CRUELTY FREE EUROPE, CRUELTY FREE INTERNATIONAL, EUROGROUP FOR ANIMALS AND PEOPLE FOR THE ETHICAL TREATMENT OF ANIMALS FOUNDATION

COVID-19 AND ANIMAL EXPERIMENTS

It is essential that authorities – under the leadership of the World Health Organization (WHO) – work together with a focus on humane, human-relevant research.

In many respects, the COVID-19 crisis is becoming a catalyst for change: from what we buy and eat to how we socialise, study, and work, it's not business as usual.

Around the globe, governments, researchers, clinicians, and companies are working like never before to find and test treatments, develop vaccines, and design strategies to limit transmission of the virus. Yet some research risks falling back on default methods, focusing on animal "models" that are not only partially approximating the behaviour of COVID-19 in humans but also adding to the suffering caused by this pandemic.

As huge numbers of animals and billions of dollars, pounds, and euros are being directed towards trying to solve the problem, it is vital that the scientific and technical merits and ethical aspects of proposed research are robustly assessed in each and every case.

We all want to see a safe and effective vaccine produced as quickly as possible. But we are also concerned about the suffering that is being and will be inflicted on thousands of animals, including monkeys, dogs, cats, ferrets, and mice. Genetically modified mice infected with the coronavirus, for example, frequently experience severe suffering involving laboured breathing, lethargy, and death. These animals and their experiences matter, and their suffering presents a significant ethical issue for society as a whole.

It is imperative, therefore, that efforts made by countries and institutions to coordinate research are maintained and that these focus on the use of humane and human-relevant methods as well as data sharing to prevent any duplication of effort or repeated testing on animals.

The need for more resources to be directed towards studying the virus in humans should also be urgently addressed in order to increase our understanding of the disease, treat patients, and limit the spread of the virus.

We welcome the coordinated actions at national and international level that have been initiated by bodies such as the WHO. We urge the WHO and other coordinating bodies to recognise the harms to animals used in coronavirus research and to ensure that the focus is on the use of humane, human-relevant research in the urgent search for safe and effective treatments and vaccines.