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Frequently Asked Questions

Chimpanzees and Their Use in Scientific Experiments

1. Isn't it illegal to use chimpanzees in experiments?

In some countries, but not in the United States. Based on what is known about chimpanzees' intelligence, emotions, and similarity to humans, experimenting on them is morally wrong. Australia, Austria, Balearic Islands, Great Britain, Japan, The Netherlands, New Zealand, and Sweden have banned or limited research on chimpanzees. Germany, Italy, Norway, and Ireland have not used chimpanzees in experiments for a number of years, although there is no law against it. The European Coalition to End Animal Experiments is calling for the European Commission and Parliament to include a ban on primates including all great apes and wild-caught primates in research. The U.S. is the only remaining large-scale user of chimpanzees in biomedical research in the world.

2. Where do U.S. laboratories get chimpanzees?

Chimpanzees were captured from Africa and brought to the U.S. In the 1950s, many were brought in by the Air Force for air and space experiments. In 1973, the Endangered Species Act prohibited the capture of certain species, including chimpanzees. By then, there were enough chimpanzees in the U.S. to breed future captive chimpanzees for research. Most chimpanzees used in research today were born in laboratories. Only a few wild-caught chimpanzees remain. While free-living chimpanzees are classified as "endangered," captive chimpanzees are classified as "threatened," thus allowing their use for research.

3. How many chimpanzees are currently used in laboratory research?

Exact numbers are difficult to obtain. Worldwide, there are far fewer chimpanzees than other species used in research. In Gabon, the Primate Center of the International Center for Medical Research (CIRMF) has about 75 chimpanzees for use in research.

Japan has an unofficial moratorium on invasive experiments involving great apes. They still conduct behavioral and cognitive research geared towards "understanding the biological, behavioral and socioecological aspects of primates, and the origin and evolution of man." This research is conducted at the Kyoto University Primate Research Institute, which has 15 chimpanzees who are part of a program called the Cooperative Research Program. Each year about 170 visiting scientists carry out research on the monkeys and apes.

In 2006, the New York Blood Center (NYBC) ended chimpanzee research and closed the Vilab II chimpanzee research facility in Liberia. According to the Hepatitis Research Foundation (HRF), which is associated with the NYBC, Vilab's remaining 74 chimpanzees were resocialized into groups and released into the Liberia Chimpanzee Sanctuary, previously known as the Vilab II Island Sanctuary Project. However, based on the HRF website, it appears that a "recently completed chimpanzee [vaccine] trial" was conducted involving HBV and HCV viruses with clinical trials scheduled to begin in 2008 when "chimpanzee research [would] no longer [be] needed."

With an estimated 1,100 chimpanzees in twelve U.S. research facilities, the U.S. remains the sole large-scale user of chimpanzees in research in the world. The majority of the chimpanzees are housed at six biomedical facilities. Relatively few of them are in active protocols. Most are "warehoused" for potential future research.

4. Aren't some experiments humane, like teaching chimpanzees to read?

Although it might appear that experiments that do not involve medical procedures are humane, such experiments are more harmful than generally thought. When researchers study cognition, emotion, or behavior, chimpanzees' natural living conditions may be severely disrupted. Examples include living alone in small cages, or having restricted or no social contact with other chimpanzees. In a lab, freedom is always limited. The barrenness of a laboratory alters their mental capacities, and leads to depression, trauma, or even psychotic behaviors. Seemingly less intrusive research still creates a life of loneliness, frustration, fear, and despair.

Examples of purportedly "humane" research include "cross-fostering" studies in which chimpanzees are raised as part of a human family. These studies are among the cruelest because they result in a chimpanzee who cannot identify with his or her own species. Instead, they come to behave as a human. Due to their great strength, they typically end up isolated and confined, handicapped in their ability to interact with their own species, and prevented from interacting with the humans with whom they identify.

5. Don't we have to use chimpanzees to find cures for human illness?

In general, animals have proven to be very poor models for human disease research. Because they are genetically different from humans, studying illness in animals can give us inadequate or erroneous information about illness and cures in humans. Even though chimpanzees are our closest genetic relatives, the disparity is great enough that even chimpanzees do not accurately model human pathophysiology. Differences in chimpanzee and human physiology impact the outcomes of attempts to use chimpanzees to study human disease.

One example is HIV infection. In the 1980s, scientists discovered that chimpanzees could be infected with HIV and believed this would lead to cures and vaccines for AIDS. However, HIV acts differently in a chimpanzee. Chimpanzees do not become immunodeficient as humans do, do not exhibit any long-term symptoms, and HIV becomes undetectable in the blood of a previously infected chimpanzee. In light of these differences, a review article published in 2000 opined "Defending the usefulness of the chimpanzee as a model for HIV research has not only become a difficult task, but also a controversial one" (Nath et al., 2000). Thomas Insel, M.D., former director of the Yerkes National Primate Research Center, declared that 15 years of work in chimpanzees has produced little information relevant to humans, stating "I can't tell you what it is that those [chimpanzee] studies have given us that has really made a difference in the way we approach people with this disease [HIV/AIDS]" (Smaglik, 1999). A huge decline in their use to study HIV/AIDS followed, such that AIDS-related chimpanzee studies fell from almost 30 studies per year in 1998 to just four in 2005 and only three in 2006-2007. Another example includes their use to test the efficacy of HIV vaccines. All vaccines that have proven safe and efficacious in chimpanzees (as well as other nonhuman primates) have failed in humans, with the latest (in 2007) actually increasing a human's chance of HIV infection.

6. What is life like for chimpanzees in laboratories?

This varies depending on the laboratory and experiment. There is always confinement. By law, chimpanzees may be confined in cages that measure a mere 5' x 5' x 7'. Though they are supposed to be given contact with their own species, it can be very minimal, sometimes only visual, and does not match their rich family network in nature. For some experiments, particularly infectious disease, it is legal to isolate them entirely, comparable to placing a human in solitary confinement. With few exceptions, laboratories are barren, even hostile environments

that deprive chimpanzees of trees, sky, fresh air, grass, rivers, family, and friends. Add to this the pain of procedures, routine in many experiments. The stress and fear of never fully knowing what is happening compounds everything. Even "routine" blood draws or injections are magnified because they typically require that the chimpanzee be anesthetized. In the laboratory, anesthesia is often administered with the use of a dart gun. Darting – known as "knockdowns" – is extremely terrifying. It is not unusual for a chimpanzee to be darted several times to administer the correct dose, often surrounded by many lab personnel with dart guns. Escape is impossible. The situation can result in darts hitting the chimpanzee's eye, scrotum, or other vulnerable body part. With darting, chimpanzees experience the pain of the projectile shots, followed by unconsciousness. When they awaken, there is often the pain or discomfort from the procedure itself. Consider Billy Jo's story as recounted by the Montreal sanctuary Fauna Foundation, where he lived for just eight years until he sadly passed away in 2006:

> In 14 years at the lab, Ch-447 was knocked down over 289 times – 65 [times] with 4 or 5 men surrounding his cage pummeling him with darts…. In the lab, he would shake his cage back and forth trying desperately to prevent anyone from approaching. To this day, Billy cannot bear to have strangers grouped in front of him.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the life of a chimpanzee in a laboratory is fraught with anxiety, pain, and fear. A recent paper, *Building an Inner Sanctuary: Complex PTSD in Chimpanzees,* (www.releasechimps.org/2008/04/24/chimpanzees-suffer-ptsd) attests to this fact.

7. Are there humane laws that oversee the treatment of chimpanzees in laboratories?

There are laws governing the use of some species, including chimpanzees, in laboratories. The laws purport to guarantee "humane" care. In these regulations, "humane" means that the experiment is approved by other scientists; the species used is justified; pain medication is considered *unless* it interferes with results – in which case it can be withheld. The Animal Welfare Act states specifically that the law is not intended to interfere with institutionally approved research. As a result, the majority of proposed experiments are allowed, regardless of the suffering.

Chimpanzees are also covered under the Chimpanzee Health Improvement, Maintenance and Protection Act (CHIMP Act). Passed in 2000, the law acknowledges a distinct status for chimpanzees and provides some federal support to retire chimpanzees not active or "needed" in research. It prohibits breeding in the federal retirement system and euthanasia for the convenience of a lab. However, until very recently a major flaw in the law allowed for so-called "retired" chimpanzees to be brought back into active research if certain criteria were met. This loophole was officially closed in December 2007 with the passage of the "Chimp Haven is Home Act," which now provides permanent protection from research for all retired chimpanzees.

8. Why single out chimpanzees? Don't all animals deserve protection?

Yes, all animals feel pain and fear and have a will to survive. All animals deserve protection from human harm. In challenging the experimental use of chimpanzees, we challenge our use of all other species. Chimpanzees' emotional and cognitive similarity to us presents a disturbing discrepancy in our ethics and forces us to ask: what characteristics do humans possess that make it illegal and immoral to hurt them while we continue to use and abuse chimpanzees? With neither an ethically justifiable nor logical answer, we must conclude that their use in experiments is immoral. This recognition breaks through the species barrier that permits harming all animals in the name of science. Freeing chimpanzees from use in experimentation establishes a platform from which to consider our use of all other species. Further, in exposing the scientific limitations, harm, and dangers of using a species even as similar to us as chimpanzees, the implications for the use of other species is called into scientific question as well.

9. What will we do with chimpanzees if we release them from laboratories?

Chimpanzees, like all captive animals, cannot be released to the wild. They are strangers to that world. The money spent to house and experiment on them must be redirected to provide quality, environmentally-rich sanctuaries. This adds no new costs, since public tax dollars already pay for them to be held in laboratories. Funds for their lifetime care have been allotted under the CHIMP Act, and the caring public is showing its support through donations to private sanctuaries that provide for chimpanzees rescued from research. Chimpanzees deserve restitution for the decades of harm humans have caused them. Restitution is affordable and the responsibility of a compassionate society. The captive chimpanzee population will dwindle through natural deaths, while the end to federal funding to breed chimpanzees will help assure that no future generations are condemned to a life in captivity.

10. Have any chimpanzees made it out of a laboratory and into sanctuary?

A growing number of sanctuaries house hundreds of chimpanzee survivors from laboratories, entertainment, or the "pet" trade. Sadly, once removed from their natural habitat or bred in captivity, chimpanzees can never be truly free. Their disrupted lives are condemned to dependency on humans. Their incredible strength requires that they must be confined. We can never give back to chimpanzees what we have taken from them – the right to be free and live autonomously. Still, several sanctuaries do outstanding work and give them the best possible life captivity can provide. Save the Chimps, the Fauna Foundation, and the Center for Great Apes are three such examples.

11. Is there anything I can do to stop chimpanzees from being used in experiments?

Yes.

- ✓ Knowledge is power – learn everything you can about their plight. Then talk to your family, friends, and colleagues, and urge them to speak out on behalf of chimpanzees in laboratories.

- ✓ Help us end the use of chimpanzees in research by contacting your House representative(s) and ask them to co-sponsor and vote favorably on the Great Ape Protection Act (GAPA) – H.R. 5852. This bi-partisan bill will end invasive research and testing on chimpanzees in U.S. laboratories and retire approximately 600 federally owned chimpanzees to permanent sanctuary.

- ✓ Join NEAVS' Project R&R: Release and Restitution for Chimpanzees in U.S. Laboratories. Visit our website at www.ReleaseChimps.org and join our action alert list now by emailing us at ReleaseChimps@neavs.org.

Together, we can bring the plight of chimpanzees to the forefront of public awareness; be their voice to federal law and decision makers; and pass GAPA to procure their release and provide them the restitution in sanctuary they so deserve.