Guidelines for Toe Clipping of Rodents

Toe clipping is used as a method of identifying small rodents by using a predetermined numbering code¹ and may simultaneously be used as a method to obtain biopsy tissue for genotyping. Toe clipping should only be used in altricial pre-weaning rodents (e.g. mice and rats, NOT guinea pigs) after the toes are no longer webbed and before they reach eight days of age. Every reasonable effort should be made to minimize pain or distress, including limiting the number of digits clipped to one digit per rodent. If possible, it is preferable to remove toes from a hind paw rather than a forepaw. If the forepaw must be used, it is preferable to not cut the hallux (“dew claw” or “little toe” of the forepaw) as this may decrease the rodent’s grasping ability. To ensure pain and distress is minimized, sharp clippers or instruments should be used and personnel performing the procedure should be trained.

Although the toe clipping method of animal identification has been considered to be a painful procedure, recently it was reported²³ that toe clipping produces no more acute pain or distress than other commonly used rodent identification procedures when performed on mice from five to seven days of age. These studies also reported no long-term effects of this procedure in test batteries evaluating physical and behavioral development. It may be the preferred method for neonatal mice up to seven days of age as it appears to have few adverse effects on behavior and well-being at this age.⁴

References