

US researchers defend animal testing

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A Chinese researcher injects a monkey with an experimental solution at a laboratory in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou. US researchers defended animal testing, telling a small group at one of the biggest science conferences in the United States that not doing animal research would be unethical and cost human lives.

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The researchers, who are or have been involved in [animal research](#), told a symposium at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) that testing on animals has led to "dramatic developments in research that have improved and affected the quality of human life."

"To not do animal testing would mean that we would not be able to bring treatments and interventions and cures in a timely way. And what that means is people would die," Stuart Zola of Emory University, which is home to the Yerkes National Primate Research Center, told AFP after the symposium.

Treatments for diseases such as diabetes and polio were made possible through animal research, the researchers said, and animals are currently being used in hepatitis-, HIV- and stem cell-related research, among others.

But animal rights activists continue to bring pressure on laboratories that use animals to develop drugs and vaccines, urging them to stop the practice and use other means to develop the next wonder drug, treatment or cure.

Animal rights activists also insist they will never use medications developed through [animal testing](#), but the researchers said they probably already have done.

"I get a lot of emails from animal rights activists, and one of them said, 'I have [hepatitis C](#), and if you discover any drugs using [chimpanzees](#) that help [hepatitis C](#) patients, I'm not going to take them,'" John Vandenberg of the Southwest National Primate Research Center in Texas told AFP.

"I didn't communicate back to him that if he's taking any drug whatsoever for hepatitis C, it was developed with chimpanzees. There's this ignorance in the world as to where these drugs come from, where vaccines come from," he said.

The researchers also argued that animal research in the United States is covered by a bevy of rules and regulations to ensure that the animals used in testing are treated humanely.

"It is quite dramatically regulated," said Zola.

Institutions that receive federal funding have to have an "animal care and use committee that reviews every protocol that uses even a single rodent," said Zola.

That protocol is then reviewed by another panel, which includes veterinarians, experts in medicine, and a representative of the public, and only when everyone has signed off on the protocol can testing proceed.

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