

Arguments for...

Why do drugs, and other substances undergo animal testing?

Every day you use products on your skin and body that have gone through extensive testing, to ensure they are safe for human use. From washing your hands and face first thing in the morning to the arts and crafts supplies you use in your school projects, you use a variety of products every day without considering how safe they might be for your health. You never give a second thought to the safety of the products you use daily – shampoo, household cleaning supplies, toothpaste – because animal testing has judged them to be safe for human use. Today, most products are safe, but that wasn't always the case. Thanks to testing required by law, we are sure that modern consumer goods are safe to use.

This testing helps save lives. Poison control centres receive almost 1.6 million phone calls each year related to accidental poisonings from items such as household cleaners or chemicals. More than 60% of these calls are related to young children ingesting or putting such products on their skin or in their eyes. Without testing, we could not know what needs to be done in the case of accidental ingestion or exposure. Research conducted on these products helps doctors treat patients who have been accidentally exposed to potentially harmful substances.

Testing protects people, animals and the environment. Testing tells us that the shower gel you use won't seriously harm your eyes; that the chemical spill at a local plant won't harm the environment. Poison control centres receive more than 40,000 calls about animal poisoning, mostly involving family pets. Through animal testing, we learn how to safely use products near pets, livestock and animals in the wild. Information on accidental misuse or overdosing designed to protect humans also protects animals.

Why do we test cosmetics?

Every day, your family uses cosmetics – deodorant, perfumes, and makeup – that have been tested on animals. Without these tests, your family would be at risk for serious illness every time they use a product. We need to know that the shampoo they use, the lipstick they wear, the shaving cream they shave with are all safe. Adequate testing of each and every product available today is a moral and legal obligation to the public.

It was circumstances that led to such animal testing of consumer products. Only a few decades ago, people were regularly using products that hadn't been tested and therefore weren't safe. Use of these products often led to illness and injury and sometimes even resulted in blindness and death.

Why can't we use computer models instead of animals?

Computer models are often used instead of animal testing, or as well as animal testing. However, a computer just isn't the same as an animal or human, it can't simply mimic or copy an entire biological system. That's why animals are used.

There are alternatives to animal testing – mathematical models, computer simulations and tissue cultures are used in initial testing. But these procedures cannot reliably predict the effect of a chemical on the combined organ systems of a human body. They are helpful as a starting point but should not be relied on entirely.

Why use animals then, as they are not the same as humans?

Although animals and humans appear to look quite different, there are still striking similarities between humans and various species of animals. Much of what we know about the immune system has come from studies with mice and rats and research on dogs has provided a great deal of information about the cardiovascular system.

Also, don't forget that animal research helps other animals. Vaccines for parvovirus in dogs and feline leukemia in cats were made possible wholly because of animal testing. Research on animals has also provided methods to bring some species back from the brink of extinction so it definitely has its advantages.

In fact, without animal research, virtually every medical breakthrough of the past century would not have been possible. Thanks to the animals used in research, we have discovered vaccinations for diseases such as polio, we know how to transplant organs, we know how to transfuse blood and we know how to deal with patients involved in serious trauma, such as a car accident. In addition, research has shown us how to prevent cancer and heart attack simply through nutrition and exercise. The creation of insulin for diabetics, hip replacement surgery, and dialysis for kidney patients have all come from animal research.

(Information taken and adapted from website 'Kids4research')