

ELON MUSK'S HERPES PROBLEM

Musk's Neuralink former employee forced to work with herpes infected monkey; sues company

Story by TOI World

NEW DELHI: Elon Musk's brain-implant startup Neuralink is facing a lawsuit from a former employee who claims she was forced to work with monkeys carrying the Herpes B virus under unsafe conditions and was later fired after announcing her pregnancy. The complaint, filed on Friday in a California state court, adds to growing scrutiny of the company's treatment of animals and workplace practices.

The lawsuit by Lindsay Short, a former employee at Neuralink's Fremont, California, site, alleges that the company created a hostile work environment filled with unrealistic deadlines, blame, and shaming. According to Bloomberg, Short, who joined Neuralink in August 2022, was fired after informing her supervisors of her pregnancy.

In her complaint, Short alleges that she was made to work with monkeys that carried the Herpes B virus, a potentially deadly pathogen, without adequate protective gear. On one occasion, she says, a monkey scratched her through her glove, and in another

incident, she was scratched on her face. The company allegedly threatened “severe repercussions” when she sought medical attention for these injuries.

Short is suing Neuralink for retaliation, wrongful termination, and gender discrimination, among other claims. She also contends that the company did not honor its promise of flexible work hours to accommodate her family, and instead demoted her two months after a promotion in May 2023.

Neuralink did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the lawsuit. The company, which is in the early stages of clinical trials for its brain implant designed to aid paralyzed patients, has been criticized in the past for its treatment of animals during research.

According to Reuters, Neuralink has faced a federal investigation over potential animal-welfare violations. The probe, initiated by the US Department of Agriculture's Inspector General, came after internal complaints that Musk's pressure to speed up development led to rushed and botched animal tests, resulting in unnecessary suffering and deaths. The investigation, reported by Reuters in December 2022, looked into violations of the Animal Welfare Act at Neuralink's facilities.

Neuralink's past animal research has included a partnership with the University of California, Davis, where surgeries on monkeys reportedly resulted in severe complications and deaths, as noted by an animal rights group. The group, Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, accused Neuralink and UC Davis of using incorrect surgical methods, leading to the unnecessary suffering of the test animals.

Elon Musk has been known for pushing his teams to move quickly, often under intense pressure. According to Reuters, employees at Neuralink have reported a high-stress environment with Musk demanding accelerated timelines for development. Musk has previously expressed his disdain for using animals in research but has emphasized the need for fast progress in developing technologies that could potentially help people with severe disabilities.

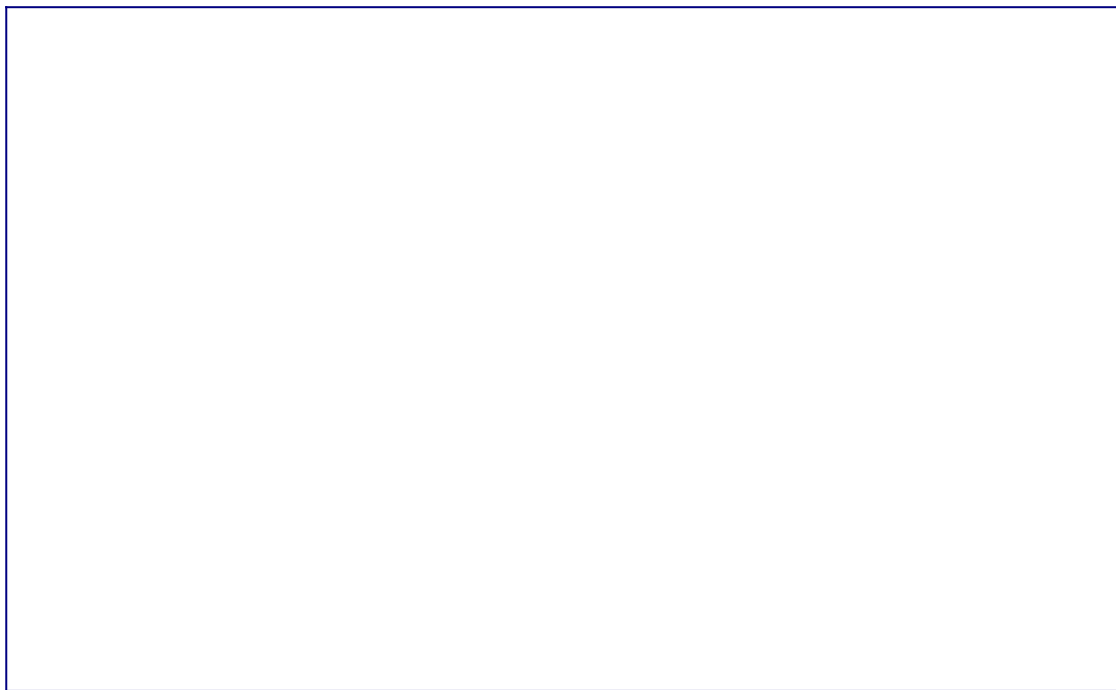
Neuralink's approach has involved testing multiple aspects of its technology in rapid succession without fully addressing issues from earlier experiments, leading to repeated tests and additional animal deaths. This practice has raised concerns among current and former employees about the quality of the data and the ethical implications of the company's research methods.

In an attempt to improve public perception, Neuralink has made efforts to create better living conditions for its test animals, including developing facilities referred to internally as “Monkey Disneyland” or the “monkey Taj Mahal,” according to former employees. However, these measures have done little to mitigate the backlash against the company’s animal testing practices.

Neuralink’s ongoing legal and ethical challenges highlight the broader difficulties faced by companies in the high-stakes field of medical research, where the pressure to deliver results can sometimes conflict with ethical and regulatory standards. As Neuralink continues its efforts to bring its brain-implant technology to market, the scrutiny over its treatment of both employees and animals is likely to intensify.

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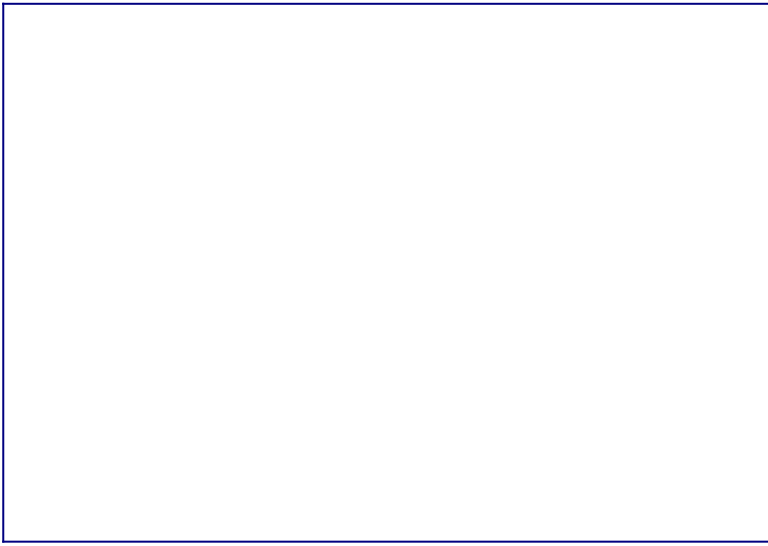


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By [senateinv6](#) September 19, 2024

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