



# Rabbit Fact Sheet

## Occupational Safety and Health Information

### ***General Safety Information for Persons Working with Rabbits***

The following information is intended to inform individuals who are involved with the care and use of animals about potential hazards (e.g., zoonoses, allergies, injuries) associated with working with various animal species and to provide information as to how they may lessen these hazards (e.g., personal hygiene, personal protective equipment [PPE]).

### ***Zoonotic Diseases of Rabbits***

Rabbits can carry organisms that may cause infection and disease in humans (zoonotic diseases, zoonoses) and these may be transmitted either directly (e.g., through bites) or indirectly (e.g., through exposure to feces). Most rabbits in a laboratory setting, however, are strictly monitored to assess their health status, and development of disease in humans usually only occurs in people who are immunosuppressed (e.g., people taking medications that impair their immune system such as steroids, other immunosuppressive drugs, or chemotherapy for cancer treatment), or who are immunocompromised (e.g., people with HIV/AIDS, or people who have had their spleen removed). Occasional cases of zoonotic disease in humans from laboratory rabbits have included: **Pasteurella multocida**, **Francisella tularensis** (tularemia), **Q Fever**, **ringworm** and enteric diseases (e.g. **Cryptosporidia**). Some of these diseases may not produce observable signs of illness in the rabbits; therefore, if you handle laboratory-housed or wild rabbits or their wastes you must take appropriate precautions to prevent transmission of these infections. You can view more information on these agents and other agents in [Appendix C](#) of the university Infection Prevention Program and the [Occupational Safety and Health Program for Animal Handlers](#).

### ***Injuries from Handling Rabbits***

Rabbits are generally docile animals that are easy to handle. Rabbits can cause bite and scratch injuries to handlers. It is essential that people who handle rabbits for research or teaching be provided with training in proper handling techniques in order to avoid injury to themselves or the animals, such specific handling and restraint techniques, and protective clothing requirements.

### ***Allergic Reactions to Rabbits***

Some people may be allergic to allergens (a protein material which causes an allergic reaction in people) produced in rabbit urine or skin secretions. These allergens can be carried by air currents in the animal room, and can come into contact with your skin, eyes, nasal passages, and lungs, where allergic reactions can occur. People with allergies to rabbits may have sneezing, congestion, itchy and watery eyes and skin rash/itching when they are exposed to rabbits or to rooms and equipment used to house rabbits.

## ***How to Protect Yourself***

**Wash your Hands:** The single most effective preventative measure that you can take is thorough, regular hand washing. You must wash your hands (and arms if long-sleeved garments are not worn) after handling rabbits. You should avoid touching your face, eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands or contaminated gloves. You must never eat, drink, smoke, or apply makeup in animal rooms.

**Wear Personal Protective Equipment:** Laboratory coats, overalls, scrub suits, and gloves may be required when undertaking some tasks with rabbits. Wash your hands and arms after removing your gloves. Garments with long sleeves are advisable to reduce the risk of scratch injury on your arms. Face masks (e.g. N-95) or PAPR's should be used if you have allergies to rabbits. Respiratory protection (mask or respirator) should be worn if there is a risk of aerosol transmission of a zoonotic disease. Employees who need to wear respiratory protection must be medically cleared by Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) before being fit tested with a respirator (if applicable). Complete the [medical survey form](#) to start this process if you are an employee. Students will be fit tested by EHS after providing our medical staff a note from your primary care physician, or after signing an 'informed consent' form at the time of service.

**Tell your Physician you work with Rabbits:** Whenever you are ill, even if you are not certain that the illness is work related, always mention to your physician that you work with rabbits. Many zoonotic diseases have flu-like symptoms and would not normally be suspected. Your physician needs this information to make an accurate diagnosis. Questions about personal human health should be answered by your physician.

**Seek Medical Attention Promptly:** If you are injured on the job (e.g., bitten) provide immediate first-aid. Stop the bleeding of wounds and wash the affected areas with soap and water. For fieldwork where soap and water may not be readily available, use of baby wipes (available in small portable packages) or alcohol-based cleansing gel is acceptable. Alcohol-based gels are neutralized by organic matter so the first application should be wiped off to remove debris, or the area can be cleaned first with a baby wipe, and the next application of gel can be left on the skin.

- Immediately report the incident to the facility director, your supervisor, or the teaching instructor if applicable.
- Those individuals needing immediate medical treatment for serious injuries may visit an appropriate healthcare provider for treatment (e.g., emergency room, primary care physician, students may also be treated at Student Health Services). Immediate medical treatment may be required if:
  - An individual's ability to breath properly is affected;
  - Bleeding is excessive and difficult to control;
  - An injury clearly needs sutures; or
  - There is a loss of consciousness associated with the incident.
- If you are working with a purposefully infected animal, the individual seeking medical attention must take a Hazard Summary sheet or agent SDS and present them to the healthcare provider prior to receiving services. It is important that the healthcare provider

be made aware of the hazards present in the facility in order to appropriately diagnose and treat an individual.

- Employees' supervisor completes an [Employers' Accident Report](#) within 24 hours of the incident for employees. This document is specific to the Workers Compensation Program and is required prior to any follow-up medical services being provided for employees.
- The facility director or manager completes a General Incident Report form to be used by the facility director, facility manager, and Environmental Health & Safety for review of the incident.