



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 cases 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.

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 understand 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: Gloves may be required when undertaking some tasks with rabbits. Wash your hands and arms after removing your gloves. Garments with long sleeves 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. People who need to wear respiratory protection should be medically cleared before being fit tested with a respirator (if applicable).

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. 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 your supervisor (if applicable).
- Individuals needing immediate medical treatment for serious injuries should visit the nearest medical treatment center (e.g., emergency room or urgent care clinic).
- 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.