

Working with Rabbits

Animal Use Medical Screening (AUMS):

All personnel working with animals, their tissues, or working in areas where animals are housed must submit an Animal Use Medical Screening (AUMS) form every 3 years to screen for exposure to possible health hazards in the work environment. Complete the form online at:

<https://www.ehs.washington.edu/research-lab/animal-use-medical-screening-aums>

Potential zoonotic diseases from rabbits:

Zoonotic disease is very rare in the laboratory environment because of efforts to screen for disease agents and maintenance of rabbits under specific pathogen-free conditions. However, see *Appendix A: Zoonotic Disease Potentials from Rabbits* for a list of agents found in wild rabbits. *Pasteurella* and *Trichostrongylus* may be present in rabbits purchased from non-Specific Pathogen Free vendors.

Preventative measures:

- Tetanus booster should be obtained every 10 years.
- The need for rabies immunization for persons working with quarantined animals must be evaluated by the Occupational Health Nurse. Contact the UW [Employee Health Center](#) at 206-685-1026.
- Only trained personnel should handle the rabbits.
- Wear appropriate clothing and personal protective equipment (PPE). Wear protective gloves when handling the animals. Wash hands thoroughly upon completion of the tasks with the animal and upon removal of the glove/PPE. Use antiseptic hand sanitizer between glove use if needed, until you can get to handwashing facilities.

Injuries:

- See the [EH&S Exposure Response Poster](#).
- Immediately wash area thoroughly with soap and water for at least 15 minutes.
- Control any bleeding and cover with protective dressing (bandage, etc.)
- For any injuries, needlestick/sharps injury or for signs/symptoms of wound infection such as redness, swelling or pain, contact the Employee Health Center at 206-685-1026. After hours or if the clinic is unavailable, go to the [UWMC Emergency Department](#). For incidents at Harborview, call the Harborview Employee Health Services at 206-744-3081. After hours, go to the [Emergency Department at Harborview](#).
- Report injuries on the UW Online Accident Reporting System (OARS) at: <http://www.ehs.washington.edu/workplace/accident-and-injury-reporting>

Illness:

- If you develop signs or symptoms that you think may be related to your work with animals and/or research work, contact the Employee Health Center.

- If you see your own provider, inform him/her that you work with these animals and any other pertinent information regarding your research work. Inform Employee Health after seeing your healthcare provider.
- Report work-related illness on the UW Online Accident Reporting System (OARS) at: <http://www.ehs.washington.edu/workplace/accident-and-injury-reporting>

Allergies:

If you suspect you may be experiencing allergy symptoms, such as runny nose and sneezing (allergic rhinitis), irritation and tearing of eyes (allergic conjunctivitis), asthma, or skin rash (atopic dermatitis), contact the Employee Health Center. Those who already have asthma and/or other allergies are at an increased risk.

- A major glycoprotein allergen is found in the fur of rabbits, and minor allergenic components are found in rabbit saliva and urine.
- Precautions and methods of control to prevent exposure to animal allergenic substances can be found in the NIOSH alert online, [Preventing Asthma in Animal Handlers](#).

References:

- CDC The National Institute for Occupational Health, Preventing Asthma in Animal Handlers: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/97-116/>
- UW Research and Occupational Health webpage: <https://www.ehs.washington.edu/research-lab/research-occupational-health>
- University of California Davis Zoonosis Information by Species webpage: <http://safetyservices.ucdavis.edu/ps/occh/acuohp/pem/zis>
- Washington State University Zoonotic Diseases webpage: <https://iacuc.wsu.edu/zoonotic-diseases/>
- U.S. Air Force Zoonotic Diseases webpage: <http://www.phsource.us/PH/ZD/index.htm>

Contacts:

- [UW Employee Health Center](#): 206-685-1026
- Harborview Employee Health Services: 206-744-3081
- For questions on AUMS: 206-221-7770
- For questions on UW Online Accident Reporting: 206-543-7388

Appendix A: Zoonotic Disease Potentials from Rabbits

**Appendix A
Zoonotic Disease Potentials from Rabbits**

Disease/ Infective Agent	Reservoir/ source of infection	Transmission	Disease in people
Cryptosporidium	Protozoal organism that is common in mammals, particularly in younger animals.	Fecal/oral	Self-limiting diarrhea
Enteric Yersiniosis, <i>Y. enterocolitica</i> and <i>Y. pseudotuberculosis</i>	Present in wild rabbits but rarely laboratory rabbits	Fecal/oral	Gastroenterocolitis characterized by fever, diarrhea, and abdominal pain.
Leptospirosis, <i>Leptospira</i> spp	Bacteria found in many animals such as rats, mice, voles, hedgehogs, gerbils, squirrels, rabbits, hamsters, reptiles, dogs, sheep, goats and horses. Most commonly associated with livestock and dogs. Can be found in standing water.	Transmission from laboratory rodents to people has been reported, but modern laboratory rodents and rabbits are free of <i>Leptospira</i> spp. Leptospire are shed in the urine of infected animals. Direct contact with urine or tissues via skin abrasions or contact with mucous membranes has been reported. Transmission can also occur through inhalation of infectious droplet aerosols and by ingestion.	Flu-like symptoms, mild to severe. Death has been reported.
Pasteurella multocida, <i>Pasteurellosis</i>	A common pathogen of rabbits, associated with infected bites and scratches.	Via bite or scratch.	Infected wounds.
Trichostrongylosis	Roundworms often carried by wild rabbits and livestock.	Ingestion of larvae.	Heavy infections can cause gastrointestinal problems (abdominal pain, diarrhea, anorexia), headache, fatigue, anemia and eosinophilia.
Tularemia, <i>Francisella tularensis</i>	A bacterium found in wild rabbits, but not laboratory rabbits, that poses a serious zoonotic risk and is considered a select agent.	Handling infected animals, inhalation of contaminated aerosol, ingestion of contaminated water.	High fever, lymph node swelling and ulceration of entry site, cough, chest pain or difficulty breathing.