

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WORKING WITH GUINEA PIGS, HAMSTERS, AND GERBILS

All personnel working with animals, their tissues, or working in areas where animals are housed must complete an [Animal Use Medical Screening Form](#) every 3 years or more often at the discretion of the Occupational Health Nurse. Access the form on the EH&S website at www.ehs.washington.edu/research-lab/animal-use-medical-screening-aums.

The Animal Use Medical Screening Program (AUMS) evaluates and addresses potential health risks related to working with research animals.

Occupational health recommendations for UW personnel working with guinea pigs, hamsters, and gerbils include the following:

- 1) **Tetanus boosters** should be obtained every 10 years.
- 2) **Wear protective gloves when handling animals.** Wash hands thoroughly upon completion of tasks with animals and after glove removal.
- 3) **Prevent transmission of zoonotic diseases** (including, but not limited to):
 - *Campylobacter jejuni*: Transmission via fecal-oral route; person-to-person transmission is possible but rare. Usual incubation is 3 to 5 days, range 1-10 days. Food-borne transmission is common. Disease in people: Acute enteritis (nausea, colicky abdominal pain, nausea, diarrhea), fever, chills, and headache. More serious complications of disease can occur for immunocompromised persons and children.
 - *Lymphocytic choriomeningitis*: This arenavirus naturally infects hamsters and guinea pigs; rare in laboratory animal facilities. Mice and hamsters are the only animals known to develop latent infection. Transmission: Contact with tissues including tumor, feces, urine, and aerosolization of all of the above. Disease in people: Flu-like symptoms, mild to severe.
 - *Leptospirosis*: Gerbils and hamsters are reservoir hosts. Transmission: Direct contact with urine or tissues of infected animals, inhalation of infectious droplet aerosols and ingestion. Disease in people: fever with sudden onset, headache, chill myalgia, and conjunctival suffusion.
 - *Yersiniosis*: Occasional reports of lab guinea pig infection; transmission: fecal-oral. Disease in people: a gastroenterocolitis syndrome-fever, diarrhea, abdominal pain.
 - *Salmonellosis*: Transmission is through the oral/fecal route, directly or indirectly. Incubation period: 6-72 hours. Symptoms include sudden onset of diarrhea, nausea, abdominal pain, and low-grade fever.

- Mongolian gerbils: Zoonoses are rarely attributable to gerbils and the only risks in that regard would appear to be the Hymenolepis tapeworm and Salmonella infections.

4) Injuries

- 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 UW Employee Health Center at 206.685.1026. Outside of normal business hours (8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Friday) or if the Employee Health Center is unavailable, go to the UW Medical Center Emergency Department.
- Report injuries within 24 hours on the UW's [Online Accident Reporting System \(OARS\)](#) accessed through the EH&S website.

5) Illness

If you develop signs or symptoms that you think may be related to your work with animals and/or research work, contact the UW Employee Health Center at 206.685.1026. If you see your own provider, inform him/her that you work with these animals and any other pertinent information regarding your research work.

6) Allergies

Allergic components exist in the dander, fur, saliva, and urine of guinea pigs; however, urine is the major source of allergen.

Allergic sensitivity has also been reported among individuals working with gerbils.

If you have suspected 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 UW Employee Health Center at 206.685.1026.

Precautions and methods of control for preventing exposure to animal allergens can be found in the NIOSH ALERT, "[Preventing Asthma in Animal Handlers](#)." This document can be downloaded at www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/97-116/ to make available to personnel.

Additional information on [animal allergens](#) is available on the EH&S website.