

Occupational Health Recommendations for Persons 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. This is a program to identify and provide follow up for individuals who may be at greater risk for contracting zoonoses. This form can be accessed electronically at:

<http://www.ehs.washington.edu/rbs/resocchealth.shtm>

1. Tetanus boosters should be obtained every 10 years.
2. Wear protective gloves when handling the animals. Wash hands thoroughly upon completion of tasks with animals/glove removal.
3. **Zoonotic diseases:**
 - *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 hrs. 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 Employee Health Clinic at Hall Health at 685-1026. After hours or if the clinic is unavailable, go to the UWMC Emergency Department.
 - Report injuries on the UW OARS on-line reporting system 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 Employee Health Clinic at 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 in dander, fur, saliva, and urine in guinea pigs. But urine is the major source of allergen. Allergic sensitivity has been reported in 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 Employee Health Clinic at Hall Health, 685-1026.
- Precautions and methods of control to prevent exposure to animal allergenic can be found in the NIOSH ALERT, "Preventing Asthma in Animal Handlers". This document can be downloaded at to make available to personnel at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/97-116/>