

## Personnel

### Item 2 - Occupational Health Policy for Individuals with Animal Contact

#### Subsection 2.8 - Occupational Risks of Working with Rabbits

##### Allergies

Background: Allergic reactions to rabbits primarily involve fur allergens, although saliva and urine can also be associated. The amount of allergens in the air is directly proportional to the number of animals in the room and the amount of work activity.

Diagnosis: Skin testing can be performed, but is not administered routinely. History of previous sensitivities to other allergens might indicate increased risk of developing sensitivity to rabbits. Allergic symptoms include sneezing, nasal congestion, itchy eyes, cough, wheezing, shortness of breath, or hives.

Prevention: Dedicated clothing (lab coat) and gloves worn only when working with animals is effective in decreasing exposure. Secure handling that prevents the animal from struggling also helps decrease exposure. Good personal hygiene is important, especially frequent hand washing. Surgical masks are probably not very effective in preventing exposure. For those with known sensitivity, an OSHA-approved dust-mist respirator should be worn, but these require specific fitting to the user.

##### Bites and Scratches

Background: Rabbits tend to be very docile and therefore bites are rare. The animal will usually display several other fear/aggression signs prior to biting like laying their ears back, "thumping" rear legs and gnashing teeth. Scratches are more common, but this is usually due to the animal not feeling comfortably restrained and struggling, not from aggression.

Prevention: Good handling techniques are most important. Thick, protective gloves are really unnecessary since they make handling more awkward and will result in the animal struggling more. Gentle, supportive handling should eliminate all but the occasional accidental scratch.

Treatment: Wash thoroughly with an antibacterial soap and water. Complete an incident report. Seek medical attention if there is excessive bleeding, pain or joint involvement. If swelling, discoloration, chronic pain or any discharge develops, seek medical attention immediately.

##### Other Risks

Non-Specific Pathogen Free Rabbits: There are a few diseases that can be carried by animals not from commercial research sources (wild caught or pet stores) and passed to humans. Tuberculosis, Yersiniosis, Ringworm and external parasites are a few examples. The Department of Laboratory Animal Resources should be notified if noncommercial source rabbits are to be utilized and can provide further information on any of these diseases.

##### Additional Information

###### Books:

Occupational Health and Safety in the Care and Use of Research Animals, Institute for Laboratory Animal Resources, National Research Council. National Academy Press, 1997.

The Biology of the Laboratory Rabbit, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Manning, Ringler & Newcomer, eds.  
Academic Press, 1994.

Videos:

The Humane Care and Use of The Guinea Pig and Rabbit, Laboratory Animal Training  
Association, 1992.

Internet:

<http://clueless.ucdavis.edu/> - This is the laboratory animal occupational health information  
provided by the University of California – Davis; compiled by Dr. Phil Tillman.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact Dr. Robert Quinn, Director  
of the Department of Laboratory Animal Resources at 4-6563.

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