

Important Points

- Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water immediately after handling your pet rodent, their cage or any other equipment.
- If you are ever bitten by a rodent, the bite-wound should be promptly cleaned and disinfected before being covered by a waterproof dressing.
- Always supervise children when they handle rodents and teach them good hand hygiene.
- If you are ill enough to seek medical attention, tell the GP or nurse that you own/keep/have handled a rodent.
- Full detailed guidance available at the [Health Protection Agency website](http://www.hpa.org.uk)



Health Protection Agency

www.hpa.org.uk

From 1st April 2013, the Health Protection Agency will become part of **Public Health England**.

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Reducing the risk of human infection from pet rodents



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Rodents, for example rats, mice, gerbils, guinea pigs and hamsters, are very popular pets in the UK. All rodents can carry bacteria and viruses that can cause infections in people. Although uncommon, these infections may have serious consequences for humans. This leaflet describes the risks of infection from a pet rodent and also gives some basic advice on how to reduce these risks. This advice will help people to prevent infections and serious illness caught from pet rodents.

How are infections passed from rodents to humans?

Rodents can carry infections and not show any signs of illness. Rodents can pass on the infection to humans in their urine, droppings, saliva and dander (akin to dandruff from animals, although not always visible). Infections can be spread by:

- rodent bites or scratches,
- contact with rodent urine, droppings, saliva or bedding,
- contact with objects contaminated with rodent urine, droppings or saliva
- breathing in rodent dander, dried droppings and urine, or dust from dirty bedding materials.



How do I reduce the risk of catching an infection from my rodent?

Following some simple good hygiene rules can help prevent infections from rodents spreading to humans:

- Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water immediately after handling your rodent, their cage or any other equipment.
- Hand washing is especially important before eating, drinking or smoking, or if you get rodent urine directly on your skin. See [good technique](#) and [video](#).
- Cover cuts, scratches or sores with waterproof plasters before handling your rodent.
- Thoroughly clean and cover any scratches or bites received from your rodent promptly.
- Do not kiss pet rodents or hold them close to your face.
- Always supervise children when they handle a pet rodent or objects that it has been in contact with and make sure they wash their hands properly afterwards.

What infections can my pet rodent carry?

Rodents, like other pets, can carry many bacteria and viruses that are harmful to humans. As rodents can appear well but still be infectious, all rodents should be presumed to be carrying infection even if they appear to be healthy.

Some of the more serious infections humans can get from rodents include [leptospirosis](#), [hantavirus](#), [rat bite fever](#) and [lymphocytic choriomeningitis](#).

Additional hygiene precautions to further reduce the risk of infection

- Keep your pet rodent and its equipment out of rooms where food is prepared and eaten.
- Keep your pet rodent out of bedrooms or where people sleep.
- Limit the parts of the house where the rodent is allowed to roam freely.
- Clean your rodent's cage regularly in a well-ventilated area, ideally using disposable gloves and a suitable face mask.
- When disposing of used bedding, dampen it with a good amount of water (to stop airborne particles) before adding disinfectant and leaving to sit for at least five minutes. Place the disinfected bedding in a plastic bag and dispose of it in the bin.
- If you remove all the bedding from the cage (and can temporarily keep your pet elsewhere) then spray the rodents' cage with disinfectant. Leave this for five minutes and then rinse and dry the cage before adding clean bedding and returning your pet to their cage.
- Do not sweep or vacuum up rodent urine, droppings, or nests as this creates airborne particles. Use a wet wipe or similar to pick up rodent droppings.
- If you are pregnant, keep your pet rodent in a separate part of the home and ask another family member or friend to clean the cage and care for the pet. Avoid prolonged stays in the room where the rodent is kept.

