

- 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 anyone in the household is aged under 5 years, elderly, has chronic conditions or a weak immune system or is pregnant, extra caution should be applied when handling your pet

Important Points

- always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water immediately after handling your pet rodent, used bedding, their cage or any other equipment
- if you are ever bitten by a rodent, the bite-wound should be promptly and thoroughly cleaned 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 or have handled a rodent
- full detailed guidance available at the UK Health Security Agency website www.gov.uk/reduce-infections-from-pet-rodents

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Reducing the risk of human infection from pet rodents



UK Health Security Agency working with the Animal & Plant Health Agency and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

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, rodent excrement, used bedding, 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. For an information sheet on handwashing, go to www.healthpublications.gov.uk and search for 'Best Practice: How to hand wash'
- 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 and thoroughly
- do not kiss pet rodents, hold them close to your face or let them eat your food
- 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 rubber household type gloves and a face mask such as a FFP1 or FFP2 dust mask available from DIY and hardware shops
- 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 5 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 5 minutes and then rinse and dry the cage before adding clean bedding and returning your pet to their cage