

# Healthy Pets, Healthy People

## Pet Rodents

**Pet rodents (such as hamsters, gerbils, rats, mice, guinea pigs) can make great pets for the right family. However, pet rodents, even when they look clean and healthy, can carry germs that can make people sick. Following these tips can help you and your pet rodents stay safe and healthy.**

- Pick the right pet for your family. Pet rodents are not recommended for families with children 5 years old or younger, pregnant women, or people with weakened immune systems because these groups are at greater risk for serious illness.
- Always wash your hands immediately after touching, feeding, or caring for pet rodents or cleaning their habitats.
- Play safely. Do not kiss, nuzzle, or hold rodents close to your face. This can startle your rodents and also increase your chances of being bitten. Bites from pet rodents can spread germs and possibly make you sick.
- Never eat, drink, or smoke while playing with or caring for your pet.
- Be aware that pet rodents can shed germs that can contaminate surfaces in areas where they live and roam. You don't have to touch pet rodents to get sick from their germs. Make sure rodent enclosures are properly secured and safe so your pet doesn't get hurt or contaminate surfaces.
- Keep pet rodents and their supplies out of the kitchen or other areas where food is prepared, served, or consumed.
- Clean and disinfect rodent habitats and supplies outside your home when possible. If you clean rodent supplies indoors, use a laundry sink or bathtub and be sure to thoroughly clean and disinfect the area immediately after. Never clean rodent habitats or their supplies in the kitchen sink, other food preparation areas, or the bathroom sink.
- Talk to your veterinarian about your pet's health. Your veterinarian can play a key role in helping you and your pets stay healthy.
- Tell your healthcare provider that you have been around pet rodents, whether at home or away from the home, especially if you are sick or have been bitten or scratched. Some rodent germs can cause serious and life-threatening illness in people.



**Follow these safe handling tips to take special care of your small pet and keep your family safe and healthy.**

Page last reviewed: January 19, 2017