Small Pet Rodents Can Pose a Salmonella Risk to Humans

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(Reprinted with permission from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/healthypets/animals/pocket_pets.htm)

The term "pocket pets" refers to small animals, often rodents that are kept as pets and could fit in your pocket. This definition has expanded to include a few animals that are not quite that little, but that are housed in cages. Common pocket pets include rats, mice, rabbits, gerbils, hamsters, guinea pigs, and ferrets as well as rodents bought to feed other animals such as snakes. Owning a pocket pet can be a big responsibility. It is very important that you learn how to properly take care of your pet and about diseases that it might give to people.

The *Salmonella* germ is actually a group of bacteria that can cause diarrheal illness in humans. They are microscopic living creatures that pass from the feces of people or animals, to other people or other animals. Animals can carry this germ and not appear to be ill. Rodents, like reptiles, may spread *Salmonella* to people.

When choosing a pocket pet, don’t pick one that is quiet, tired, has diarrhea, or looks sickly. The pet should be lively and alert with a glossy coat free of droppings. The animal's breathing should be normal. There should be no discharge from the eyes or nose.

Choosing a pocket pet

If one of the animals in the cage in a pet store has diarrhea or looks sick, the others may have been exposed to an infectious disease. Do not choose any of these animals as your pet. Wash your hands immediately after handling pet store animals or after touching animal cages or bedding.

If your pet dies soon after you buy it, it could have been ill with a disease that could also make people sick. Tell the pet store and do not reuse the cage until it has been cleaned and disinfected.

Tips for preventing *Salmonella* from rodents

- Washing hands with soap and water after handling rodents or their cages and bedding is the most important thing you can do to reduce the risk of *Salmonella* transmission.
- When cleaning up droppings from your pet, always wash your hands thoroughly afterwards. Young children, especially those younger than five years old, should be closely supervised when cleaning cages and should wash their hands immediately following handling rodent feces.
- Do not eat food or smoke while handling your pet.
- Do not handle pets in food preparation areas.
- Do not kiss your pet or hold it close to your mouth.

Learn more about keeping yourself and your pet healthy by visiting CDC's Healthy Pets Healthy People web site at www.cdc.gov/healthypets/index.htm.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>General Information on Washing your Hands after Handling Animals</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How to wash your hands:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Wet hands with running water.</td>
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<td>• Place soap into palms.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Rub hands together to make a lather with the soap.</td>
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<td>• Scrub all surfaces of hands vigorously for 20 seconds or longer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Rinse soap off of hands with running water.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Dry hands with a paper towel.</td>
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| • It is advisable to turn off}
• It is advisable to turn off the faucet using a disposable towel.
• Young children need assistance in washing hands.

When to wash your hands:

• After touching any animals, even your own pets.
• After touching equipment, cages, fences, food bowls that may be contaminated by animals.
• Before eating.
• Before handling or preparing foods.
• After using the restroom.
• Anytime your hands appear visibly dirty.