

Cleaning Small Pet Cages

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Routine cage cleaning is necessary to keep your rabbit, guinea pig, hamster, gerbil, rat, mouse, or other small pet safe and healthy. It provides an enjoyable, odor-free, and attractive showplace for your enjoyment as well.

Cleaning tools

Assemble a cleaning kit expressly for cleaning the cage. Store these items separately from your other household cleaning supplies. To prevent cross-contamination, never use sinks or tubs that are used for human bathing or food preparation.

- Back-up cage - a clean environment for the minutes or hours your small pet must be relocated.
- Brushes - small and medium sizes depending on your cage. A toothbrush is good for corners and crevices in cage accessories.
- Buckets
- Paper towels or cleaning cloths
- Q-tips, toothpicks, putty knives, and razor blades - needed to reach into the smallest of spaces, and remove any hardened material.
- Rubber gloves and goggles
- Sponges - 1 set for cleaning, one for rinsing, and one for disinfecting.



Cleaning schedule

The timing and amount of routine cage cleaning depends on the size and habits of your small pet. Begin by reading everything available regarding her species-specific needs and preferences. Cages of rabbits who are litter-trained and spend a large portion of the time in an exercise pen, for example, may require less time than a cage that houses several guinea pigs. Of course, you will also learn from close personal observation. In general, you will need to perform:

- A daily cleaning to remove spills, uneaten food, urine or feces; also clean and disinfect food and water dishes.
- A weekly cleaning and disinfecting of the cage and accessories.

During cleaning procedures, it is recommended to use rubber or latex gloves and protective goggles. After every cleaning procedure - no matter how large or small - wash your hands thoroughly; you may also wish to use a hand sanitizer.

Daily cleaning

As you clean, it is important to look for any signs that your small pet may be ill. Also, watch for hazardous conditions in the cage, and remove or correct them. Observe:

- Has the normal amount of food been eaten?
- Is the temperature of the cage within the proper limits?
- Are the feces and urine normal in appearance and quantity?
- Is there any evidence of parasites?
- Do any of the accessories appear frayed or need to be replaced?
- Is the cage in good repair?

Daily, remove uneaten food, wipe up water spills and remove wet spots or waste in bedding and litter. If necessary, change any bedding or litter that is too soiled.

If you deem it necessary to clean the inside the cage with a cleaning solution, relocate your small pet to another clean cage until the cage is dry and free of fumes.



Disinfectants

- Selecting the proper disinfectant for cages must be done carefully. The disinfectant must be strong enough to kill disease-causing viruses, bacteria, and fungi, yet not cause harm to the pet. It is generally best to move

Food and water dishes should be washed in hot, soapy water, and dried thoroughly. If you use a water bottle, use a bottlebrush to clean it thoroughly. Again, having two or more bottles available often makes cleanup easier. Check the bottle to make sure the ball is loose and works properly.

To provide more cleaning power, use a disinfectant. Always rinse well to be sure no trace of soap or disinfectant remains on the dishes. A good alternative is to have two or more sets of dishes, so while one set is being cleaned, the other set can be used in the cage.

Routine weekly cleaning

Once a week, or as often as needed, relocate your small pet to a clean cage, then...

- Remove all decorations in the cage.
- Clean, rinse, and disinfect water bowls (or bottles) and food bowls, as above.
- Bag and discard disposable bedding and litter.
- Clean all cage surfaces with soap and hot water, and rinse well.
- Loosen tough spots with a toothbrush, or putty knife.
- Wash and disinfect any cage accessories, such as climbing shelves, dens, or beds, per the manufacturer's cleaning instructions for each product. Rinse thoroughly and dry well.
- After washing and rinsing the cage and accessories, use a disinfectant. Be sure to rinse the cage and accessories with hot water until all residues are removed.
- Allow the cage and accessories to dry thoroughly before reassembling to reduce the possibility of mold.
- Provide the appropriate amount of bedding and litter. Re-install accessories.
- Be sure to thoroughly clean and disinfect all equipment, sponges, buckets, gloves, and sinks.
- Lastly, wash your hands with hot, soapy water.

your small pet to another room while using most disinfectants.

- Although there are many disinfectants on the market, the most readily available disinfectant for cleaning a cage is household bleach. Use bleach at a dilution of approximately 1 part bleach to 32 parts water (1/2 cup bleach to 1 gallon of water). Other disinfectants safe for your small pet may be available from your veterinarian.
- It is important to remove food, feces, soaps, etc., before using any disinfectant since the presence of organic

material will prevent it from working properly. So clean any soiled areas of the cage or its accessories with a hot solution of dishwashing liquid, rinse well, then apply the disinfectant.

- Apply the disinfectant liberally to the cage and accessories. Allow the disinfectant to have contact with the material for 10 minutes; if an item is porous, a longer time may be needed. Rinse the items, especially any wooden items, thoroughly with clean water to remove all the disinfectant. For your safety and comfort, use the bleach solution in an area that is adequately ventilated. Rubber gloves and safety goggles are also recommended. Allow the cage and all items to dry thoroughly before reassembling and placing your small pet back into the cage.