



## COLORADO 4-H ETHICAL CARE OF RABBITS AND GUINEA PIGS

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Rabbits and guinea pigs are fun to watch. They rely on you for their food, water, housing and health care, because they live in small cages or containers. Pay careful attention to the special needs of rabbits and guinea pigs.

### **Housing**

Cages for animals must be large enough to provide for normal postural adjustments. In general, this means the top is above the head when the animal stands normally, and floor space must be at least 1½ to 2 times the body length for cage width and length for each animal enclosed.

Cages and furnishings must be free of sharp edges or potentially damaging features. Floor grates must be smooth and comfortable.

Ambient temperatures should not exceed 90 degrees Fahrenheit to avoid heat stress. Acclimate animals gradually to cold. Do not subject them to drafts. If housed outdoors, animals must have protection against sun, wind and precipitation.

Maintain a normal, regular light cycle. Do not keep animals in complete darkness or light for longer than 16 hours.

### *Rabbits*

Provide nest boxes for does about to kindle. Maintain them until the young are well-furred and moving about freely.

If cages are not in a building, they must provide shelter from precipitation, wind, cold and heat. One way to provide this protection is to place the cages in shade with the roofs and solid sides to the north. Removable panels can cover open wire sides as needed.

### **Hygiene**

Thoroughly sanitize all cage surfaces and furnishings. At least once a month, clean with detergent and water and then rinse. Sanitize floor grates more often if visibly soiled.

Sanitize water bottles and feed containers at least every two weeks or more often if they become visibly dirty. Disinfect cages and furnishings between animals.



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### ***Rabbits***

For bacterial disinfection, soak or wipe down cages with 10-percent household bleach after removing all dirt and debris. Effective contact is three minutes. Rinse thoroughly. Sanitizing will partially remove coccidial oocysts, but flame or treat the cages with 10-percent household ammonia to kill all. Rinse thoroughly.

### ***Guinea Pigs***

Change contact bedding at least once a week or as it becomes soiled, damp or when it smells of ammonia.

Disinfect surfaces by soaking in or wiping down with a 10-percent solution of household chlorine bleach. Effective contact time is three minutes. Rinse thoroughly.

## **Feed and Water**

Check animals for feed available at least daily. Remove powdery fines from the feeder. Rabbits or guinea pigs cannot eat them effectively. Discard any food or water contaminated by the animals' urine or feces.

### ***Rabbits***

Feed rabbits a diet of complete-diet rabbit pellets or clean alfalfa-hay with salt available. Clean supplementary vegetables thoroughly.

Rabbits must have access to clean, fresh water at all times. Change water at least every other day.

Do not offer dirty or dusty feed to animals. If rabbits are housed outdoors and water freezes, offer fresh water at least once a day.

### ***Guinea Pigs***

Feed a basic guinea pig feed. It should be fresh to guarantee adequate vitamin C level. If you supplement vitamin C in the water, change water daily. If you feed greens or vegetables as treats or for vitamin C, they must not accumulate in the cage to wilt or mold. Clean thoroughly before feeding.

Animals must have access to clean, fresh water at all times. Change water at least every other day. Water should be accessible to all animals without standing on hind legs. If animals are housed outdoors and water freezes, offer fresh water at least twice a day.

## Handling

### *Rabbits*

Never lift a rabbit by the ears. Support a mature rabbit and hold to prevent uncontrolled kicking with its hind legs.

### *Guinea Pigs*

Pick up and handle animals so that you provide support to the entire torso.

## Veterinary Care

Isolate sick animals from well animals and provide with veterinary care.

### *Rabbits*

A veterinarian should recommend any medications given. Withdraw for the recommended time before slaughter.

### *Guinea Pigs*

Any medications administered to guinea pigs should be given only on the advice of a veterinarian.

## Transportation

Provide animals water if transport time exceeds six hours, especially if temperatures are high. Transport containers or cages may be smaller than normal cages.

### *Rabbits*

Remember rabbits generate a great deal of body heat. Closed containers may cause heat stress even at "safe" temperatures. Heat stress may be fatal to rabbits. It is imperative to avoid temperature extremes.

### *Guinea Pigs*

Cages must allow animals to stand or lie down normally. Avoid extremes of temperature during transport. Heat stress may be fatal to guinea pigs. Change bedding if wet or excessively soiled.

## Showing

Rabbits and guinea pigs will be rejected for exhibit for the following health reasons: discharges from the eyes, nose or mouth; signs of diarrhea; signs of excessive itchiness or self-inflicted scratches or other wounds; depression or lack of responsiveness; skin lesions such as flaking, thickening or cracking; or widespread broken hair shafts or loss of hair.

Animals also will be rejected for exhibit for any alteration or enhancement of natural coat color. Provide feed, water and other considerations as outlined in the section about housing. Clean exhibit boxes and cages, disinfect between animals, and as needed throughout the exhibit period.