

SAFE PET HANDLING PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As Health Officials Investigate A Virus Carried by Rodents: *Lymphocytic Choriomeningitis Virus (LCMV)*

1. Anyone with questions or concerns about human health risks may contact the Department of Health Family Health Line at 1-800-942-7434 during regular business hours. For answers to pet-related questions, contact the DEM Division of Agriculture at (401)-222-2781.
2. All pet shop, veterinarian, animal control, pest control, and public health staff members should learn about the virus and be prepared to answer questions in regard to pet rodents. They should know, for example, that mice, hamsters, guinea pigs, and all other common pet rodents are low risk for LCMV. (Please review the latest information at CDC websites.)
3. Due to their low risk of contracting LCMV, it is not necessary to euthanize and test pet rodents. It is unlikely that animals already in a home would be carrying the virus. Furthermore, there is no reliable test for live animals. If animals were to be tested, euthanasia would be required, but it is unnecessary at this time.
4. DEM recommends that pet owners practice safe handling procedures with all pocket pets. Staff should notify pet owners of these recommendations.

Safe Handling Practices:

- ✓ Wash your hands after handling or cleaning up after animals.
- ✓ Do not place food or drink around cages or animal foods.
- ✓ Supervise and educate children about safe handling.
 - Avoid hand-to-mouth contact when handling animals.
- ✓ Regular cleaning and care of the cages and materials.
 - Use gloves when cleaning cages.
 - Do not wash toys, bowls, and cages in a kitchen sink or bath tub.
 - Dispose of any waste, bedding, or food in the garbage.

5. If necessary, sick animals should be immediately evaluated by a veterinarian. The average mouse, hamster or guinea pig will most likely show no symptoms of LCMV. If a pet has symptoms such as poor appetite, weight loss, decreased activity, or lethargy; DEM recommends that the animal be evaluated by a veterinarian, as it is more likely to be an illness other than LCMV.
6. Pocket pets that have shown no signs of illness are low risk for LCMV. The CDC reports that some hamsters can carry the virus for 8 months or longer. But documented cases of transmission of the virus to humans are only known to have occurred from hamsters and mice via organ transplants. People with mice, hamsters or guinea pigs who remain concerned that their animals were exposed to LCMV should isolate the animals from pregnant woman or other people at-risk and follow the recommended Safe Handling Practices as a precaution. In fact, Safe Handling Practices are always recommended for healthy pets and healthy people.

7. Veterinarians should not euthanize any suspect animals without first contacting the state veterinarian at DEM for instructions.
8. Nuisance mice should be controlled using approved traps and pesticides. Dead mice should be handled with gloves and disposed of in the garbage in plastic bags. For more information or answers to questions on removal of mice, consult a professional pest control company.

Safe Clean up:

- ✓ Wear gloves. When there is heavy infestation. respiratory protection and protective clothing are also recommended
- ✓ With a light spray, wet down any dust or debris in exposed areas.
- ✓ Gently gather and place soiled material in a plastic bag and dispose of it in the garbage.
- ✓ Follow by washing the area with a dilute bleach solution or other household disinfectant.

Additional information about LCMV is available on-line from:

[The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management](http://www.dem.ri.gov/topics/agricult.htm) (DEM)
<<http://www.dem.ri.gov/topics/agricult.htm>>

[The Rhode Island Department of Health](http://www.health.ri.gov/topics/lcmv.php) (HEALTH)
<<http://www.health.ri.gov/topics/lcmv.php>>

[The Centers for Disease Control](http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/lcmv_rodents.htm) (CDC)
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/lcmv_rodents.htm>

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