Thank you very much for your commitment to giving small animals a second chance. We could not do it without you!
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Chapter One: Introduction

1. Welcome Aboard!

Welcome to the Ottawa Humane Society’s Foster Program. We are grateful that you have decided to give your time and efforts to help us save more lives! Since the program’s inception in 1983, foster volunteers have played a vital role in our organization by helping animals who are not yet ready for adoption for medical or behavioural reasons.

Animals recuperate faster from illness and injury in a nurturing home environment and have a greater opportunity to be socialized than they do at our shelter. In times of overcrowding or during the summer season, providing temporary respite from our busy shelter environment is also extremely beneficial for our animals.

Each year, approximately 1,400 animals benefit from the OHS foster program.

Please note: this manual is intended to supplement our feline and canine foster manuals, and to help guide you through the small animal fostering process.

2. Program Goals

The goal of the foster program is to provide as many animals as possible with a second chance for a bright future.

3. Program Objectives

- To provide nurturing, temporary homes for dogs, cats and small animals requiring short-term convalescence outside the shelter environment;
- To encourage the normal growth and development of very young, otherwise healthy animals;
- To encourage the recovery and rehabilitation of animals not yet ready for adoption;
- To protect animals, especially young and orphaned, from the risk of disease that may be present in the shelter.

4. The Ottawa Humane Society’s Mission Statement

To lead Ottawa in building a humane and compassionate community for all animals.
5. Contact Information

Fostering should be an enriching and enjoyable experience for you and your family. We are here to help and answer any questions you have as they arise.

We are supporting hundreds of foster volunteers, so please contact us to make an appointment before you visit the shelter for foster pick-ups, drop-offs, supplies, and veterinarian exams. This allows us to gather the supplies needed for your appointment and reserve the time to dedicate to you and your foster animal(s). Email usually generates the fastest response and is our preferred method of communication.

When you need to get in touch with us, who you contact will depend on the reason, and time of day. If we are not immediately available to take your call or respond by e-mail, we will get back to you as soon as possible. Please leave a message with detailed information about your foster animal, referencing the shelter ID number.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason:</th>
<th>When?</th>
<th>OHS representative to contact:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General inquiries</td>
<td>Mon – Fri 7:30 a.m. – 4:00 pm, Saturday 8:00 am – 3:30 pm</td>
<td>Customer Service Representative: Foster 613-725-3166 ext. 255 <a href="mailto:foster@ottawahumane.ca">foster@ottawahumane.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sat 4:00 – 7:30 pm, Saturday 4:00 pm – 5:30 pm, Sunday 8:00 am – 5:30 pm</td>
<td>Veterinary Technician 613-725-3166 ext. 229 <a href="mailto:tech@ottawahumane.ca">tech@ottawahumane.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency</td>
<td>Mon – Fri 7:30 a.m. – 4:00 pm, Saturday 8:00 am – 3:30 pm</td>
<td>Customer Service Representative: Foster 613-725-3166 ext. 255 <a href="mailto:foster@ottawahumane.ca">foster@ottawahumane.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal is in immediate distress, having trouble breathing, injured, etc.</td>
<td>Mon – Fri 4:00 – 7:30 pm, Saturday 3:30 pm – 5:30 pm, Sunday 8:00 am – 5:30 pm</td>
<td>Veterinary Technician 613-725-3166 ext. 229 <a href="mailto:tech@ottawahumane.ca">tech@ottawahumane.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mon – Fri 7:30 pm – 7:30 am, Saturday 5:30 pm – 7:30 am, Sunday 5:30 pm – 7:30 am</td>
<td>After-hours Emergency Line 613-725-3166 x221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pick-up and Returns</td>
<td>Mon – Fri 8:00 am – 7:00 pm, Saturday 9:00 am – 5:00 pm</td>
<td>Customer Service Representative: Foster 613-725-3166 ext. 255 <a href="mailto:foster@ottawahumane.ca">foster@ottawahumane.ca</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make an appointment to pick-up/return a foster (for surgery, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The foster department runs on seasonal schedules. We increase hours during the summer season to provide you with additional support and to accommodate the increase of animals in foster at that time. We will announce all changes in hours via email, in the Volunteer Connections newsletter and in the foster office well in advance.
Chapter Two: Key Program Policies

1. Foster Program Agreement

When you joined the foster volunteer program, you signed the foster program agreement as part of your application package. We have included a copy here for your reference.

The Ottawa Humane Society:  
1. Retains all rights and ownership of any animal in the Foster Program. The OHS has the right to recall any fostered animal to the shelter at any time.  
2. Does not require prior notice for the repossession of an animal, when a foster volunteer fails to bring the animal back to the OHS as requested.  
3. Makes all decisions regarding animals to be placed in foster.  
4. Prioritizes placements of OHS animals to foster volunteers based on the needs of the animals, the volunteer’s experience and ability.  
5. Is not liable for any injury, illness or damage to persons or property, including to owned animals, while an animal is in the foster home.  
6. May visit a foster home at any time, providing that the foster volunteer is given prior notice.  
7. Provides food and cat litter for foster animals to foster volunteers. The OHS is not responsible for any other foster expenses not agreed upon in advance.

Ottawa Humane Society Foster Volunteers:  
1. Agree they will attend a Foster Program Orientation prior to fostering.  
2. Agree that only they will provide care for OHS foster animals in their possession and understand that OHS foster animals must not be left under anyone else’s care, without authorization from the OHS.  
3. Agree that they may not travel with their foster animal nor take their foster animal anywhere that has not been approved by an authorized OHS employee.  
4. Agree to have their own animals spayed or neutered and be up-to-date on vaccines before bringing an OHS foster animal into their home. Canine vaccines include: DHLPP (Distemper, Hepatitis, Leptospirosis, Parvo, Parainfluenza) Bordetella (kennel cough) and rabies. Feline vaccines include: FVRCP (Feline Viral Rhinotrachitis, Calicivirus, Panleukopenia) and rabies.  
5. Agree to isolate OHS foster animals from existing pets in the household.  
6. Agree to keep OHS foster dogs on-leash, at all times, when in public. They also agree that dogs with kennel cough must be kept away from other dogs when in public.  
7. Agree to contact the OHS for all foster animal care needs and questions and will adhere to the emergency protocols provided in the foster manual.  
8. Agree to return OHS foster animals, as soon as they are well and/or upon request by the OHS.  
9. Agree to direct all adoption inquiries about their foster animals to the OHS Adoption Centre.  
10. Agree they may not adopt their foster animals.

Please note: failure to adhere to the agreed upon conditions may result in removal from this program.

I, the undersigned, understand and agree to the above terms and conditions of the foster program.

Foster Volunteer Signature: ________________________________

Print Name: __________________________________________

Date signed: __________________________
2. Adoption Inquiries

Remember … you **may not** adopt your foster animal. If you are interested in adopting another animal, please be sure to visit our Adoption Centre. We have this rule in place for several reasons including:

- **For the foster family:** Being a foster volunteer can be a very emotional experience. Not all animals improve or even survive in the foster home. Foster families become attached and feel that they are the only ones that can care for a particular animal. Bringing the animal back after the foster period can evoke feelings of loss and guilt in the volunteer. Guilt and loss are not a good basis for an adoption decision. To help ease this, the OHS takes the option off the table.

- **For the integrity of the OHS:** The OHS has a list of people that have made specific adoption requests and some have been waiting for extended periods of time. It’s unfair to our community and calls our integrity into question to have insiders cut to the front of the line.

- **For resource reasons:** We invest in our volunteers through training and on-going support. Historically, we lost many volunteers after they adopted animals. Losing a foster volunteer has an impact on the program and the number of animals we can rehabilitate. Those that foster once or twice and adopt use up resources that could be better spent on providing care for more animals. By remaining in the foster program, foster volunteers can help many more animals become healthy and adoptable.

- **For the fostered animal:** Our commitment is to place all adoptable animals in not only a home, but the best possible home by finding the best possible match. The selection criteria for volunteering at the OHS are not the same as for adopting. As a result, the foster family may not be the best match for the dog or cat.

If someone meets your foster and is interested in adopting, please refer them to the Adoption Centre for further assistance.

Please remember that volunteers are eligible to adopt (animals other than their foster animal) only after six months of volunteering.

3. Isolation

All small animal foster placements must be kept indoors. To minimize the possible spread of disease and/or viral transmission, isolate foster animals to one room in your home. This is primarily for the health and wellbeing of resident animals and to protect the rest of your home should your foster animal be harbouring an unknown illness. If your foster animal is harbouring an unknown illness and your home becomes contaminated, the effects are minimized when the animal has been isolated to one area of your home. In most cases, your small animal will be contained in their cage—it’s best to leave this cage in one room. We recommend using a room with easy to clean floors, such as tile or hardwood.
4. Veterinary Care for Your Foster

Although you may have an established relationship with your veterinarian, foster volunteers are not permitted to bring their foster animal to their own veterinarian. Foster animals are under the care of the OHS veterinary team, and seeing a different veterinarian does not allow for continuity of care. The OHS has a fully operational veterinary clinic onsite to treat OHS animals. If you have a medical concern regarding your foster animal throughout their placement, please contact the foster department.

5. Transporting Foster Animals

Foster animals are among the most vulnerable of animals in a shelter environment. As a result, they may need frequent trips to and from the OHS. Foster volunteers are responsible for transporting their foster animals as needed. Transportation includes visits to the OHS for regular exams, follow-up exams, emergency exams and food/supply pick-ups. All small animals must be kept in a carrier or cage during transport. We know that regular and ongoing transportation needs are sometimes challenging and appreciate your commitment to your foster animal’s welfare!

6. Bites and Scratches

Many foster animals are in need of medical and/or behavioural intervention. If a foster animal bites or scratches you resulting in any blood, contact the Customer Service Representative: Foster immediately and file a bite/scratch report with the OHS. Depending on the circumstance, the CSR: Foster will determine how best to proceed. Please thoroughly disinfect the wound and contact your doctor for medical follow-up.

7. Social Media Policy for Foster Animals

We ask that you refrain from posting information and photos of your foster animal on social media (for example: Facebook, Instagram, etc…). Foster animals are not yet ready for adoption. We would prefer to feature animals that are already in need of a permanent home! Thank you in advance for your cooperation.
Chapter Three: General Fostering Guidelines

1. Making the Match

The foster department matches animals with foster volunteers in the best interest of the animal in need.

- The CSR: Foster will call or e-mail you to inform you of small animals in need of placement. The small animal’s respective needs and the anticipated length of stay for the duration of their placement will be communicated at this time. Weekly group emails are sent to our foster volunteers with a list of animals requiring foster.

- If you agree to accept a foster placement, an appointment will be made for you to pick up your foster. A prolonged shelter stay may compromise the animal’s health and the health of other animals in the shelter, so we ask that you pick up your foster as soon as possible.

- When you meet with CSR: Foster, your small animal’s foster care plan (medication, feeding schedule, etc.) will be reviewed with you, and you will receive written home care instructions. At this time, your small animal will be ready to leave the shelter with the food (and medication if applicable) that we provide.

2. General Care Guidelines

a) Preparing your home

Once you agree to foster an animal, it is time to prepare for its arrival! Please ensure you designate one room for your small animal, especially if you have resident felines or canines. This will ensure the safety and well-being of the small animal transitioning into your home. We will provide the cage and supplies needed for the duration of the placement.

b) Arrival day

When you bring your small animal home, introduce him to the room and show him where the litter pan is (if fostering a bunny). Provide him with a fresh bowl of water and leave him alone for a little while. Give him some time to settle in and try not to overwhelm him with too many noises or visitors during the first few days of their stay. Although it can be hard to avoid cuddling him when you first bring him home, giving him a bit of time to adjust is in his best interest.
CSR: Foster will call or e-mail you within two weeks of your placement for an update, if they have not heard from your prior to that. At that time you may discuss non-emergency issues related to the health or behaviour of your foster animal and help us to determine whether the animal is ready to come back to the shelter. **If you have questions at any time, please contact us!**

**NOTE! If your foster animal becomes suddenly ill or is injured in your care, please contact the OHS immediately.**

**Remember!** You are now this small animal’s best advocate for finding the best possible match in a forever family, once he is ready! Get to know him and let us know what he likes, doesn’t like, favourite toys, etc… Please make sure you share this information through a small animal foster history sheet, so we can share this valuable information with potential adopters!

c) **Administering medication**

Administering medication to your foster may be necessary. Medications come in many different forms, and proper administration is essential for the animal to receive the maximum benefit from the prescribed treatment.

**Medications should always be given for the full amount of time as prescribed, even if your foster starts to show signs of improvement. Please follow and complete the treatment chart as instructed. Bring your chart and medications to all appointments just in case a different course of treatment is prescribed. At the end of your foster placement, return all medication and treatment charts.**

If you are required to give your small animal medication, CSR: Foster will provide you with all of the information to ensure you are comfortable administering treatment.

d) **When your small animal needs to see our veterinarian**

Fosters may be placed into foster care with a pre-existing medical condition or they may develop an illness when in foster care. If you are concerned about your foster animal’s medical status, please contact the foster department to make an appointment. If your foster needs to see our veterinarian, an appointment will be scheduled. We ask that you are on time for your appointment—animals are seen on a first-come, first-served basis (except in the case of an emergency), and if you are late you may face a prolonged wait.

Please outline any health concerns you have about your foster with CSR: Foster. Foster volunteers may not be present for the veterinary exam of their foster animal(s).
As all foster animals are respectively examined back-to-back, this process can vary in duration. Depending on the number of veterinarian exams needed, this process can take anywhere from 1-3 hours. In the summer, this process usually lasts 3 hours in duration. We ask that you wait in the lobby until the examination is complete or indicate that you will return later in the day to pick up your foster.

**NOTE! Remember to bring your completed treatment charts and any medication to all vet exams!**

In addition to regular veterinary exams, please contact us immediately if you notice the following symptoms in your foster animal, as he may need to see a veterinarian:

- Loss of appetite;
- Bleeding from anywhere;
- Weight loss;
- Fever;
- Change in attitude/behavior;
- Abnormal twitches, walking abnormally or into objects;
- Vomiting;
- Diarrhea;
- Sneezing or coughing;
- Discharge from the eyes or nose;
- Hair loss;
- Trauma: limping, accidentally dropped or stepped on, etc.;
- Difficulty breathing;
- Lethargic/unresponsive;

**e) Grooming needs**

Establish a grooming routine with your small animal from the beginning. Acclimatizing them to brushing and nail trimming helps her future family and veterinarian with handling them.

Do not bathe your small animal—they do a good job with self-grooming. If you have any questions/concerns about grooming, please contact the foster team for help.

### 3. Returning your Small Animal Foster to the OHS

When it is time to return your foster, you may feel a sense of sadness, loss, and even guilt. This is completely normal and is often the most challenging time for a foster volunteer. Your foster has been an integral part of your daily routine and you have given him a second chance at a bright future. Please know that the OHS screens all potential adopters and your foster will soon be a cherished pet in a loving home.
By completing a foster history sheet for prospective adopters, you increase the appeal of the animal while they await adoption. The information you provide gives insight into what the adoptive family can expect from their new family member. You may include photos and stories with the foster history sheet to further describe your experience with your foster. This gives adoption staff a better chance to match the animal to the best possible forever home.

**CSR: Foster will contact you when your foster animal is ready to be returned and make an appointment for return. Failure to return your foster when requested may result in termination from the foster program.**

a) If you cannot keep your foster for the duration of the required placement

In the best interest of the foster animal, it should remain in one home for the duration of the foster placement. The OHS can’t provide interim care for fosters and we ask that you only accept placements that you can commit to. We understand and respect that sometimes things happen that prevent you from maintaining your commitment or that an animal’s needs may become greater than originally estimated. In addition, only OHS foster volunteers are able to provide care for OHS foster animals and volunteers are not permitted to leave their foster with others. Should you not be able to continue to foster for whatever reason, please contact the foster department to make an appointment to return your foster.

b) Procedure for returning animals for surgery

- When your foster rabbit reaches their designated age for sterilization, CSR: Foster will contact you to advise you of the surgery date and fasting instructions.
- When you have been informed of the surgery date, arrange to return your rabbit to the shelter the day before the surgery date.
- They will be sterilized and welcomed into the Adoption Centre or PAL location following their procedure, provided there are no surgical complications.
- Since your rabbit will not be going home with you after their surgery, please ensure you bring their small animal foster history sheet with you when you drop them off for surgery.
- All treatment charts, medication and supplies should also be returned after the placement is complete.

c) Procedure for returning for adoption

In most cases, an appointment for return is made when an animal is finished all treatment and is no longer symptomatic and/or their monitoring period is up. At this time, the animal is returned and made available for adoption. When you return your foster animal, please ensure all paperwork, including the foster history sheet, accompanies the return.
4. Medical Emergencies

If you think your small animal is need of immediate medical assistance, please contact the OHS immediately. Please refer to the contact information charts (of this manual) regarding who to contact.

The OHS is unable to provide support between 7:30 p.m. and 7:30 a.m. Please monitor your foster carefully and contact us before 7:30 p.m. for advice if you believe a serious health issue is developing with your foster. It’s recommended that you always check on the welfare of your foster before going to bed.

5. Cleaning Between Placements

Any items supplied to you by the OHS should be returned at the end of a placement. Cleaning between placements is an important precaution against the spread of disease. Although your small animal will be primarily contained in their provided cage, it is good practice to disinfect the entire living area before new small animals are introduced. All surfaces need to be disinfected.

To disinfect surfaces, remove all organic material and fecal debris and then soak with a mild bleach solution (1 part bleach to 32 parts water) for at least 10 minutes. Scrub all surfaces within the small animal’s reach. Any toys or items that cannot be properly disinfected should be thrown away.

a) Cleaning and disinfecting objects and surfaces in the foster area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surface/Object</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Special Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When new animals are introduced (between animals)</td>
<td>Thorough cleaning and disinfection between animal residents</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High contact surfaces</td>
<td>Daily cleaning with a detergent and weekly disinfection</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibly soiled objects/surfaces</td>
<td>Cleaning with a detergent and disinfection</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litter boxes and food bowls</td>
<td>Daily cleaning and weekly disinfection</td>
<td>Sanitize food bowls separately from litter boxes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For additional tips on disinfection protocols, please visit this website: [http://aspcapro.org/routine-practices-prevent-infection-foster-homes](http://aspcapro.org/routine-practices-prevent-infection-foster-homes)
Chapter Four: Species-specific Care

The following sections are intended to help ease the transition of a new small animal into your home. Please note: at the time of placement, the foster team will provide you with written home care instructions sheets, as well as an OHS information pamphlet for the species that you are fostering (for example: A Quick Guide to Hamsters). A copy of the information in those pamphlets can be found here.

1. Degus

Degus are very social animals, so they need regular attention but little physical handling. Relative newcomers as companion animals, full-grown degus are about the size of a small guinea pig, with a long tail, large eyes and mouse-like ears. They are highly social animals and are happiest when sharing their habitat with another degu. Degus are sensitive to being handled, but do enjoy human companionship. Their antics, often accompanied by excited chittering or gentle coos, can keep you entertained for hours. Their average life span is five to ten years.

Degus are very social animals. No matter how attentive you are, a degu will be much happier with another degu companion.

Before fostering a degu, consider the following:

- Degus need nutritious food, fresh water and a clean habitat.
- Degus need daily exercise and play.
- All household members should understand how to hold a degu, and should be as eager as you to welcome a degu into the family.
- While they are excellent companions, most degus do not like to be handled.
- Degus require a larger habitat than most rodents.
Setting up house

**Essential items (provided by the OHS)**
- Spacious cage with solid bottom
- Shavings
- Hiding box
- Food bowls
- Water bottle
- Guinea pig food or chinchilla pellets
- Hay
- Large ceramic bowl and chinchilla dust
- Gnawing objects
- Exercise wheel (try to find a large wheel with a solid surface)

**Optional items (provided by you or the OHS if available)**
- Hay rack
- Climbing frame of untreated wood
- Digging pit
- Portable playpen
- Pesticide free branches

**Handling**
Most degus are cautious about being handled. But they must be handled daily if they are to remain tame. Do not put your hand in their cage and back them into a corner or swoop your hand down from above. Both will be perceived as the actions of a predator. Allow your degu to come to you. Start by letting your degu sniff your hand and progress to hand feeding. With enough training, your degu may eventually climb into your hand. You may then pick up your degu gently in your palm. Never pick a degu up by the tail!

**General care**
Regular exercise outside the cage is essential for your degu’s health. A room can be made safe for degus by preventing access to electrical cords, removing hazardous items and blocking gaps under appliances and furniture. Alternatively, a playpen will allow your foster to romp in safety. Never let a degu outside of the cage unsupervised.

Degus clean themselves by rolling in dust, so you will need to provide a dust bath. Fill a large ceramic bowl with chinchilla dust and place it in your degu’s cage. Remove the dust bath once your degu has finished. Repeat this two to three times a week.

**Housing**
Degus require lots of space. A cage will be provided to you. Place it in a dry, draft-free room, out of direct sunlight. Height is important as well as length and width; degus love to climb. Cover the floor with bedding provided to you (such as aspen shavings, recycled paper, corncob bedding) and avoid cedar shavings, which contain harmful oils. Your foster will also appreciate a
nesting box. Tear unscented white tissue into narrow strips to provide a safe, inexpensive nesting material. Food should be offered in a ceramic bowl and fresh water in a sipper bottle.

Degus need plenty of exercise and stimulation, so provide a variety of toys. A large exercise wheel is a good choice. Many degus do well on metal wheels with rungs, but you should monitor carefully on metal or plastic wheels with rungs to make sure he is not injuring his feet. Climbing frames of untreated wood and pesticide-free branches from beech, maple or fruit trees will allow your degu to climb, while a large deep box filled with soft sandy soil provides a place to dig. Pieces of untreated wood and cardboard rolls will satisfy your degu’s urge to gnaw and help keep teeth properly worn down.

Keep your degu’s habitat clean by removing soiled litter daily. Thoroughly clean the water bottle once a day. Wash food dishes and the cage bottom once a week. Always rinse and dry the cage well before adding clean bedding and returning your foster to his cage.

Diet
Food will be provided to you. Your degu’s primary source of food should be guinea pig mix or chinchilla pellets. Most authorities believe that sugar is not good for degus. Fresh hay should be constantly available, preferably in a hayrack. Supplement your degu’s diet with fresh vegetables, but never fruit, which is high in natural sugars. As an occasional treat, offer your degus nuts, seeds or puffed rice. Fresh water should be available at all times.

Fertility
Degus become sexually mature very early—at between three and six months—and their gestation period (pregnancy) is very short.

2. Gerbils

Gerbils are friendly and inquisitive, and will thrive in a quiet, dimly lit space in your home. Curious, friendly and intelligent, gerbils can be happy and healthy in almost any home. Once tamed, they make ideal companions for children or busy apartment dwellers. Gerbils are highly social animals and are happiest sharing their habitat with another gerbil. Their average life span is between one to three years.

Before fostering a gerbil, consider the following:

- Gerbils need nutritious food, fresh water and a clean habitat.
- Gerbils need daily exercise and play.
- All household members should understand how to hold and play with a gerbil, as the gerbil will likely need taming.
Setting up house

**Essential items (provided by the OHS)**
- Spacious cage with solid, deep bottom
- Nesting box
- Shavings
- Water bottle
- Pre-mixed gerbil seed or pellets
- Gnawing material
- Ceramic or metal food dish
- Exercise wheel
- Cardboard tubes (provided by you)

**General care**
Gerbils enjoy time outside their cage, but should not be allowed to roam unsupervised. They can quickly squeeze through tiny spaces and become hidden or hurt. Your gerbil can use a wheel or a plastic ball to run around in for exercise, but will still require supervision.

No matter how attentive you are, a gerbil will be much happier with another gerbil companion. We will pair them together when possible.

**Handling**
Most gerbils need to become accustomed to handling, a process that can take up to two weeks. Children should not handle a gerbil until taming is complete. Give your foster a day or two to settle into their new home, then gradually accustom them to your presence. Begin with presenting your hand for sniffing, progressing to hand feeding and gentle scratching on the back of the head. Don’t rush things—let your gerbil set the pace.

To pick up a gerbil, calmly coax your foster into a corner and gently lift with both hands. Some gerbils like to jump, so form a little cave with your hands and keep them inside. A tame gerbil may like to explore your lap or perch on your shoulder, but stay alert for jumping. Never pick up a gerbil by the tail, even at the base.

**Housing**
A cage and bedding will be provided to you. Place your foster’s home in a quiet space, away from direct heat and sunlight. Gerbils love to dig, so fill the cage with two to three inches of bedding. Aspen shavings, recycled paper, corncob or CareFRESH® are all good choices. Avoid sawdust and cedar chips, which contain harmful oils.

Your gerbil will need constant access to fresh water. Bottles are preferable to bowls, as your gerbils are likely to kick bedding into a bowl. Gerbils will also need objects to gnaw on. Cardboard and untreated wood pieces from the pet store are all
good choices. Gerbils love old toilet paper rolls, running in and out of the tubes before gnawing them to shreds.

Gerbils also appreciate a nesting box. Tear unscented white tissue into narrow strips to provide your gerbils with safe, inexpensive nesting material. Some gerbils enjoy an exercise wheel. Many gerbils do well on metal wheels with rungs, but you should monitor your foster carefully on metal or plastic wheels with rungs to make sure she is not injuring her feet.

Keep your gerbil’s habitat clean by removing soiled litter daily. Wash food dishes, water bottles and the cage bottom once a week. Always rinse and dry the cage well before adding clean bedding and returning your foster to his cage.

Diet
Food will be provided to you. A good commercial gerbil food will provide your gerbil with a balanced diet. Pellets and seed mixes are both available. You can supplement the feed with occasional treats such as puffed wheat, dried kidney beans, apples, lettuce and carrot. Just place the food in the centre of the cage and allow the gerbils to forage. If you provide a food dish, the gerbils will probably bury it with their bedding, but this is not a problem. Make sure the gerbils have eaten everything before replenishing their food. Otherwise, your gerbils may pick out their favourite high-fat foods, leaving the healthier alternatives behind. Fresh water should be available at all times.

Fertility
Gerbils become sexually mature at five weeks. Because it is difficult to find enough appropriate homes for them, breeding of gerbils is strongly discouraged.

More information

3. Guinea Pigs

Guinea pigs may be small, but they need roomy cages, a specialized diet, daily cleanup and gentle handling to be happy and healthy.

Guinea pigs make delightful companions for both adults and families. Once settled in their new home, guinea pigs are inquisitive, friendly and talkative. Guinea pigs are social animals. Their average life span is four to eight years but, with proper care and nutrition, guinea pigs can live up to ten years.

Before fostering a guinea pig, consider the following:

- Guinea pigs need nutritious food, fresh water and a clean habitat.
- Guinea pigs need daily exercise and play.
- All household members should understand how to hold and play with a guinea pig, and they should all be as eager as you to temporarily welcome a guinea pig or two into the family.
Setting up house

**Essential items (provided by the OHS)**
- Spacious cage with solid bottom (no aquariums!)
- Two water bottles (if you’re housing two or as back-up when you are away from the house)
- One food dish (medium-sized ceramic or attachable bowl to the sides of the cage)
- Hay racks
- Aspen shavings, CareFRESH® or other safe litter (no cedar shavings)
- Plain guinea pig pellets (no seeds or nuts!)
- Large bag of green timothy hay
- Soft brush & metal comb for long-haired guinea pigs (provided if available)
- Fresh green vegetables (provided by you)
- Small piece of fruit (provided by you)

**Optional items (provided by you or the OHS if available)**
- Igloo
- Bird toys made of untreated wood
- Large diameter ferret tubes
- Portable playpen
- Cat carrier for travel
- Medium or large Fiddle Sticks®
- Bag of alfalfa hay for pups and sows after (not before) they’ve given birth

**General care**
Regular exercise outside the cage is essential for your guinea pig’s health, as well as great fun for the family. A room can be made safe for guinea pigs by preventing access to electrical cords, removing hazardous items and blocking gaps under appliances and furniture. Alternatively, a playpen will allow your foster to romp in safety. Guinea pigs enjoy a variety of safe toys such as wide tubes, cartons and wood bird toys.

Most guinea pigs are cautious about being picked up, but love being petted once they are on your lap. Children must be supervised when holding a guinea pig and taught not to hold it too tightly or allow it to fall or jump. Guinea pigs are easily injured and may nip if not handled gently. While your guinea pig is on your lap, brush it gently to keep the coat sleek.

**Housing**
A cage and bedding will be provided to you. Cover the floor with bedding such as aspen shavings or CareFRESH®. Avoid sawdust as well as cedar, which contain harmful oils.

The cage is best kept in a room where your foster can enjoy your company, out of drafts and direct sunlight. A temperature range of 65-75º F is ideal. Guinea pigs love a house or igloo to rest
in and appreciate a few safe toys to play with, such as bird toys made from untreated wood. Choose heavy food dishes, or those that clip onto the cage, so the contents don’t spill.

Keep your guinea pig’s habitat clean by removing soiled litter daily. Wash food dishes, water bottles and the cage bottom once a week. Always rinse and dry the cage well before adding clean bedding and returning your foster to its cage.

**Diet**

Food will be provided to you. A healthy diet for adults is based on guinea pig pellets and quality grass hay, such as timothy hay. Both should be freely available at all times. Pups under six months and pregnant sows need alfalfa hay. A constant supply of hay provides fibre, vital to keep the teeth and digestive system in good shape. Guinea pigs must have adequate vitamin C in their diet.

Also provide each guinea pig with a cupful of mixed fresh vegetables and fruit daily. Choose produce with a high vitamin C content, such as parsley, romaine lettuce, bell peppers and dandelions, occasionally adding a piece of carrot. Fresh water in a sipper bottle should be available at all times. Nutritional supplements are not necessary if a good, varied diet is provided.

**Fertility**

Male guinea pigs can be sexually mature at three weeks of age. Males and females must be kept separate at all times to prevent unwanted offspring. Because it is difficult to find enough appropriate homes for them, breeding guinea pigs is strongly discouraged.

**Warnings**

- Penicillin-based drugs, commonly prescribed for other pets, are toxic to guinea pigs.
- Exercise wheels and balls can cause injury to guinea pigs and should never be used.
- Never leave your guinea pigs unsupervised where a predator or other pet could harm them.

**More information**

- Guinea Pig Care: [www.guineapigs.info](http://www.guineapigs.info)
4. Hamsters

Introduced about 70 years ago, hamsters have become one of the most popular small pets. Frisky and fun to watch, hamsters tend to sleep during the day and play at night. Hamsters warm to human companions, but don’t welcome the company of their own kind. A single hamster can provide hours of enjoyment as you watch your foster frolic and stuff his or her cheeks with seed. The very private hamster makes a great companion and will thrive in a quiet, dimly lit room away from the sun, drafts and other animals. An average life span is 2 years.

Before fostering a hamster, remember:
- Hamsters are nocturnal, requiring cleaning, feeding and handling in the late afternoon or evening.
- Hamsters need nutritious food, fresh water and a clean habitat daily.
- Hamsters need daily exercise and play.
- All household members should understand how to hold and play with a hamster, and they should all be as eager as you to temporarily welcome a hamster into the family.
- A foster hamster may require taming.

**Essential items (provided by OHS):**
- Spacious cage with solid bottom
- Shavings
- Hiding box (a cardboard box will do)
- Ceramic food bowl
- Water bottle
- Hamster mix or pellets
- Gnawing objects
- Nesting material
- Exercise wheel

**Optional items (provided by you or the OHS if available):**
- Wooden ladders
- Tubes and tunnels
- Exercise ball
- Salt lick
- Hayrack and hay

**General Care**
Hamsters are nocturnal and can become cranky if you disturb their daytime sleep. Try to limit cleaning, feeding and handling to the late afternoon and evening. Accommodate your hamster’s natural rhythms, and you will find an eager companion. Hamsters don’t seek the companionship of their own kind. Introducing another hamster is not advised. If you allow your hamster outside the cage, supervise him very carefully—a hamster can be difficult to find, and if there’s a place
to hide, a hamster will find it! Hamsters also have poor eyesight and may walk right off the edge of a table or chair. Your hamster can explore your house safely in a plastic exercise ball, but she will still need to be closely supervised. Hamsters can easily be injured by a tumble down the stairs or an unintentional kick.

Handling
Some hamsters may be already accustomed to handling, others require time to adjust to your touch. If your hamster is reluctant to be handled, spend time near the cage, speaking quietly. Progress to hand feeding his/her favourite treats and, finally, you’ll be able to gently scoop up your hamster. To pick up a hamster, gently scoop him/her into the palm of one hand, with your other hand placed gently over the hamster’s back to prevent jumping.

Housing
A cage will be provided to you. Place your hamster’s home in a dimly lit room, away from drafts, direct sunlight and noise. Find a location that will allow the hamster to sleep during the day and family members to sleep at night. Check any cage closely for secure fastenings, as hamsters love to escape!

Line the bottom of the cage with any safe bedding. Cover the floor with bedding such as aspen shavings, recycled paper, corncob bedding or CareFRESH®. Avoid cedar shavings, which contain harmful oils. Since hamsters are solitary, private animals, your foster will appreciate a hiding house. An old cardboard box will double as a gnawing object. Shred white, unscented tissues to provide nesting material.

Hamsters are orderly creatures, so place a sturdy ceramic food dish well away from the sleeping and bathroom areas and attach a sipper bottle to the cage. Some hamsters enjoy an exercise wheel. Many hamsters do well on metal wheels with rungs, but you should monitor your foster carefully on metal or plastic wheels with rungs to make sure he/she is not injuring his/her feet. Offer other safe materials for playing and gnawing as well. Toilet paper and paper-towel rolls can provide hours of gnawing and romping.

Keep your hamster’s habitat clean by removing soiled litter daily and removing stockpiles of perishable food. Clean the sipper bottle and tube daily to prevent the buildup of food and bacteria. Wash the food dish and cage weekly. Always rinse and dry the cage well before adding clean bedding and returning your foster to his cage.

Diet
Food will be provided to you. Pellets provide a good, balanced diet, but offer hamsters no variety. Many hamsters will refuse them. Mixes can be a sound alternative, but many are high in fatty foods. Make sure your hamster has eaten all the mix in the dish before adding more. Otherwise, your hamster may pick out favourite high-fat foods, leaving the healthier alternatives. Supplement the feed with alfalfa pellets and fresh vegetables and fruits, such as spinach, lettuce, apple and cauliflower. A hayrack filled with hay can provide necessary roughage, and a salt lick can prevent mineral deficiencies.
Never offer beans, apple seeds, parsley, tomatoes, or green or sprouted potatoes, all are poisonous to hamsters. Fresh water should be available at all times.

Fertility
Hamsters become sexually mature at six to eight weeks. Because it is difficult to find enough appropriate homes for them, breeding hamsters is strongly discouraged.

5. Mice
Despite the reputation of their wild cousins, pet mice can be delightful members of your household. Mice are highly social animals, happiest when sharing their habitat with another of their kind. Mice generally live between two and three years.

Before fostering a mouse, consider the following:

- Mice need nutritious food, fresh water and a clean habitat daily.
- Mice need daily play and interaction.
- All household members should understand how to hold and play with a mouse and be as eager as you are to welcome this new foster into the family.

Setting up house

**Essential items (provided by the OHS):**
- Spacious cage with solid, deep bottom
- Shavings
- Ceramic food dish
- Water bottle
- Formulated rat or mouse food
- Nesting box
- Gnawing objects

**Optional items**
- Nesting material
- Toys
- Exercise wheel (no rungs or spokes!)
- Travel cage

**General care**
Mice enjoy an occasional romp outside the cage but must be supervised closely. Their small size makes escape more likely.

Mice are social animals and will be happiest in the company of another of their kind. If possible, the OHS will foster a pair of the same sex.
Handling
Mice are generally not fond of handling, but with patience mice can become quite tame. Give mice plenty of time to become used to your presence before trying to pick them up. When holding or carrying a mouse, cup your foster with one hand and hold the other over the back. A short fall could cause serious injury.

Housing
Place your foster’s cage away from drafts and direct sunlight and out of reach of other household pets. A cage will be provided to you.

Line the bottom of the cage with the bedding provided to you. Your mouse will appreciate a hiding house such as an old cardboard box, which also doubles as a gnawing object. Shred white, unscented tissues to provide nesting material. Offer food in a sturdy ceramic dish and water in a sipper bottle.

Mice love to play, so provide plenty of toys. These need not be expensive. Old tissue boxes and paper rolls will occupy your foster for hours. For more variety, tunnels, ropes and ladders can be purchased. Some mice also enjoy an exercise wheel, but many don’t. Commercial gnaws or twigs from a pesticide-free beech, maple or fruit tree will help keep your foster’s teeth properly worn down.

Keep your foster’s habitat clean by removing soiled litter daily. The sipper bottle and food dish will need daily cleaning as well. Wash and disinfect the cage at least once a week. Always rinse and dry the cage well before adding clean bedding and returning your foster to its cage.

Diet
Food will be provided to you. Pellets, blocks and mixes are available for mice. Mixes tend to be high in fatty foods, so the best choice is formulated pellets or blocks supplemented by fresh fruit and vegetables and occasional treats, such as nuts, seeds and cheese. Never offer food containing chocolate or caffeine. Fresh water should be available at all times.

Fertility
Mice become sexually mature at six to seven weeks. A mouse’s gestation is 19 to 21 days, with litters between 8 and 12. Because mice are so prolific, breeding them is strongly discouraged.

More information
The Rat and Mouse Club of America (http://www.rmca.org/)
6. Rabbits

Rabbits are intelligent, social animals. When given plenty of attention, they make affectionate and rewarding family pets. They can be trained to use a litter box. Given appropriate care, a rabbit can live up to ten years.

Before fostering a rabbit, consider the following:

- Rabbits need daily exercise and play.
- Rabbits need nutritious food, fresh water and a clean habitat.
- Everyone in your household should understand how to hold and play with a rabbit, and be eager to temporarily welcome a rabbit into the family!
- Rabbits can be destructive. They like to chew on books and wooden furniture and electrical cords, and will need to be monitored and confined.

Setting up house

Essential items (provided by the OHS)

- Spacious cage with solid bottom
- Litterbox
- Shavings
- Hiding box
- Bowl or gravity feeder
- Rabbit pellets
- Hay
- Water bottle
- Digging box
- Chew toys
- Pet carrier (for car transport)
- Comb (for long-haired rabbits)
- Fruit and veggies (provided by you)

Optional items (provided by you or the OHS if available)

- Sturdy, secure outdoor pen

General care

Rabbits should be lifted with their weight fully supported, with your hands under their feet, and never by the scruff of the neck or ears. They can easily be injured through improper handling. Brush your rabbit’s coat daily and if you are interested in learning how to trim his nails, the foster team can teach you. Your rabbit should have plenty of out of cage time, though hazards such as electrical cords and toxic plants should be removed or made inaccessible to prevent accidents. Rabbits will chew and dig, so provide acceptable items for these purposes, such as
untreated wooden toys and a safe digging box filled with straw. Encourage your rabbit to use these items to minimize damage to your furnishings. Kind training, using lots of praise and treats, will teach your rabbit how to be a member of a family.

**Housing**
Rabbits are very sensitive to heat stroke. Keep the environmental temperature at or below 80º F and make sure your rabbit’s cage is well ventilated. A cage will be provided to you. Fill his cage with shaving and give your rabbit a litter box filled with safe litter—never use cedar shavings, which contain harmful oils. A hiding box will also be appreciated. Chew toys such as untreated wicker baskets, untreated wood blocks and cardboard boxes will keep your rabbit busy. Remember that your rabbit needs ample daily exercise outside the cage to stay healthy and fit.

Keep your rabbit’s habitat clean by removing soiled litter daily. Wash food dishes, water bottles and the cage bottom once a week. Always rinse and dry the cage well before adding clean bedding and returning your foster to the cage.

**Diet**
Food will be provided to you. A healthy diet is based on good quality rabbit pellets and ample fresh timothy hay. Hay should be freely available; it is vital as a source of fibre for good digestive function. Avoid alfalfa hay, as it is high in calcium and could result in kidney stones. Add at least two cups of fresh vegetables per six pounds of body weight each day. Good choices are dark green leafy vegetables and root vegetables. Small amounts of fresh fruit may be given as a treat. Fresh water in a sipper bottle should be available at all times.

Rabbits are prone to intestinal blockages, due to swallowing hair while self-grooming. Frequent brushing can help minimize this problem.

**Fertility**
All rabbits adopted from the OHS will be spayed or neutered prior to adoption. Many young rabbits are fostered until they are old enough to be spayed or neutered. Spayed and neutered rabbits live longer, healthier lives.

**Warnings**
- Antibiotics of the Penicillin family, such as Amoxicillin, are toxic to rabbits.
Litter Training (taken from San Francisco SPCA Rabbit Adoption Handbook)

Litter Box Do’s and Don’ts

DO:
- Have enough boxes. You need one litter box per rabbit in the household.
- Use paper-based litter or line the litter box with an absorbent layer of newspaper.
- Keep the litter box topped off with fresh, edible hay.
- Dump out the box every two to three days, or at least weekly.
- Use mild dishwashing liquid or hot water and vinegar to clean the box occasionally.
- Place the litter box in a quiet, private area—your rabbit may prefer a corner.

DON’T:
- Get a box that’s too small; your rabbit needs space to turn around, dig, and cover.
- Use clumping litter, clay litter, scented litters, or treated wood litters.
- Use strong chemicals or disinfectants to clean the box.
- Use a litter box liner or a restrictive box.
- Place the litter box near anything noisy, like a washing machine or furnace.

Tip: If you have a multi-story house, have litter boxes on each level.

Litter Box Problems

Rabbits can form aversions to the litter box for a variety of reasons, so you might need do a bit of sleuthing. Litter box problems are common and usually very fixable.

Troubleshooting Litter Box Problems

1. Check all the do’s and don’ts above to make sure you’re following the guidelines.
2. Your rabbit may choose a corner or spot that is inconvenient for you. Place another litter box in this spot and wait for your rabbit to start using it. Then slowly move this box to where you would prefer it to be. You may have to compromise and keep a second box in a slightly less convenient area of your home.
3. When exploring a new room, it is common for rabbits to leave droppings as territorial markings. Some rabbits leave small amounts of droppings outside of the litter box during
play sessions. These are easily swept up when it is time to go to bed. Putting them into the litter box will give your rabbit the message of what is expected.

4. If your rabbit is persistently peeing outside the litter box or is leaving misshapen or soft droppings, please advise the foster department.

Tip: Never yell at or punish your rabbit for not using her litter box. It will only make her afraid of you.

Training your rabbit through positive reinforcement means using your rabbit’s natural motivations to teach her which behaviors you like and which you don’t. The trick is to find the right motivations—treats are a great place to start. Most rabbits love to work for raisins!

Never use physical punishment. A rabbit’s response to yelling or physical punishment is stress—and stress is the leading cause of behavior problems and may contribute to an early death. It also erodes the trust between you and your rabbit and prevents learning.

More information: The House Rabbit Society: www.rabbit.org
Chapter Five: Additional Tips for Working with Small Animals

1. Socialization

Many small animals are surrendered to shelters because their owners say they bite. Although this can be true, this is often due to a lack of proper handling. There are two important things to remember when working with small animals.

- Hamsters, some gerbils, some mice, and some rabbits can be territorial. Their cage is small and it is the only territory that they have, so it important not to “invade” their limited space. When possible, try to use their food bowl or their house to scoop them out of their cages. Once they are out of their cage, they most likely won't bite you. Place them into your hands or lap and you can play together all you want.

- If you bring your hand down on top of a small pet—particularly a hamster, it will react as if you are a predator (and may nip you). This is because at that angle at which you are approaching instinctively reminds them of a predator's mouth. Don’t fret! The solution is simple—don’t approach them top down, rather scoop them up with both hands form underneath.

If you or anyone else adheres to these two rules, when handling your foster, you’ve just improved your chances of not getting nipped and building a positive association to handling with your small animal.

If you want your foster to establish good social skills, it should be handled for at least five minutes every day—let them run around on your lap and in your hands. Small animal play pens work well too for play time. Due to their curiosity and quick movements, your foster should always be supervised during out-of-cage play time.

(Socialization content adapted from Rabbit & Small Animal Rescue: [http://www.rasarescue.org/](http://www.rasarescue.org/))

Please contact the foster department if you notice your foster is continuing to nip despite your persistent and positive handling interactions—this could suggest an unknown medical or behavioural issue.

2. Pre and Post-natal Care

Many small animals will go into foster care to be monitored for pregnancy—this is when a female small animal has been admitted to the OHS and co-housed with a male. The only way to ensure that a female small animal is not pregnant is to foster her for the gestation period. If she does not go into labour during this time, it’s safe to assume she’s not pregnant and can be returned and placed up for adoption. The following species-specific information may aid you in
preparing your home for the arrival of offspring. Please note: if your small animal does give birth, please contact the foster department at your earliest convenience to advise of the birth(s) and to report the number of offspring in the litter.

**Hamsters:**

- Prepare her cage: ensure your foster hamster has fresh water and food at her disposal. She will also need materials to make her nest, such as straw, wood and twigs. During her gestation period, it will be essential to keep your hamster’s cage clean, removing food and excrement remains daily, but if the female has already started to build her nest, be careful not to interrupt this process. Please note: hamsters can become increasingly territorial during this time, and may be at an increased likeliness to bite.

- It is also essential to provide her with a calm and positive environment, where she can carry out a safe and peaceful gestation. To avoid exposing her to high stress contexts, you should not touch or approach the cage too often—you need to respect her territory.

- Once your hamster has given birth, you should give her privacy during nursing time, and only approach the cage to replace her water and food, temporarily suspending cleaning. You must not, under any circumstance, touch the mother or her newborn offspring. The mother could perceive your touch as a threat and could eat her young. This is most important during the first 7-10 days post-labour.

- Ensuring she is in a calm environment, keeping her separate from other hamsters during her pregnancy and postpartum period and ensuring she has a well-balanced diet will help to minimize the chances of the mother eating her young.

- When they are 3 weeks old, pups are ready to be weaned, so keep a watchful eye to ensure they are eating food.

- When they are 5 weeks old, the pups start to mature sexually. Therefore, you will need to separate the males and the females in order to prevent fights and unwanted litters.

Guinea Pigs:
- Females do become very big during pregnancy.
- If you notice your foster getting guinea pig getting larger, please contact the foster department. It is important to try to determine the number of pups in the womb, to help ensure the mother has given birth to all the pups and is not having difficulties delivering them (helps to ensure no pups have remained stuck in the womb).
- Pregnant guinea pigs have specific dietary needs, which will be explained to you by the foster team.
- Mothers can have difficulty giving birth. While some guinea pigs can give birth naturally and unassisted, others may need medical intervention. It’s very important to keep a close eye on your foster during labour in the event she needs medical support.
- Pups begin eating solid food during the first few days following their birth. Weaning is a gradual teaching process which occurs over a period of time (approximately a few weeks). Pups must be kept with their mother until the weaning process has finished, the pups can feed independently and they are at least 4 weeks of age.
- Guinea pigs reach sexual maturity early. Females can reach sexual maturity as early as approximately 4-6 weeks of age and males as early as approximately 8-9 weeks of age. It’s very important to separate the sexes to ensure no unwanted litters.


Rabbits:
- Provide a nest box in a quiet area. Mother rabbits will pull fur and gather other materials to make a nest right before she gives birth. Place the nest in the box. If she hasn’t made one, you can make one out of hay.
- Mother rabbits nurse only once or twice a day. This behavior does not mean she’s neglecting her kits.
- In the case that the kits are scattered and cold, you will need to intervene to ensure the kits are warm. They will not be able to digest food if they are cold.
- Check their bellies daily to ensure they are nursing from mom. If they have sunken bellies and wrinkled skin, this may be a sign that the mother is not lactating, and you will need to contact the foster department as soon as possible.
• Kits can be removed from their mother at 8 weeks. The kits should not be weaned earlier because they need to receive necessary gut flora and antibodies from their mother. At 8 weeks, you should also separate the male and female offspring, so they do not breed. Male rabbits can reach sexual maturity as early as 10 weeks.

(Pre and postnatal care rabbit content taken from http://myhouserabbit.com/new-to-rabbits/about-baby-bunnies/)

When to contact the shelter:

Mothers in labour do not generally require a high level of human intervention—she is best left to let nature run its course. This said, there are circumstances when a mother and/or her offspring’s health are at risk. **If you feel your foster is in jeopardy, please contact the OHS immediately for assistance.**
Chapter Six: Zoonoses

1. Zoonotic Risks in a Shelter Environment

A zoonosis (plural zoonoses) is a disease or infection that can be spread from an animal to a human.

All animals, like people, are capable of harbouring many different diseases. Sometimes they get sick from these diseases, but sometimes they can be carrying disease agents without actually becoming ill. Some of these diseases, which we call zoonoses, can be passed to people and could potentially make us sick. It is important to be aware of risks so that we know how to protect ourselves from being infected with a zoonosis. As you will learn by reading below, animals in a shelter environment are often more likely to be carrying these diseases than the pets we have in our homes. Because these zoonotic diseases can be spread in many different ways, there are some important yet simple precautions that need to be taken to protect ourselves.

2. Transmission of Zoonoses

Zoonotic diseases can be spread by direct contact with the infected animal or their body fluids, by touching an object (called a fomite) that has previously been in contact with the infected animal, by inhaling aerosolized disease particles, by ingesting the infectious agent (by touching your mouth/food with a dirty hand), or by coming in contact with an intermediate animal that spreads the disease, such as a flea.

3. Increased Risk Factors for Human Illness

Although anyone can become infected if exposed to a zoonotic disease agent, those who have weakened or suppressed immune systems are at a greater risk and can develop a more severe clinical illness. The elderly and very young are also at an increased risk.

4. Increased Risk Factors for Animal Illness

Although once in our care we do everything we can to make and keep animals healthy, animals come to our shelter with many different backgrounds, usually unknown. They often have not had appropriate vet care, and they can be infested with parasites such as fleas and worms.
5. Zoonotic Diseases

- **Giardia:** Is caused by a protozoan parasite and is less commonly seen. It causes severe and ongoing diarrhea in both animals and humans and will resolve with and without medication.

- **Ringworm:** This is a skin infection caused by a fungus, not a worm. It causes irregularly shaped areas of fur loss and rough, scaly skin on infected animals. In people, it causes a classic round, itchy red lesion. It can be contracted by touching an infected animal or the hair they have shed in the environment. Please note: All animals are screened for ringworm upon admission to the OHS via a woods lamp, although this test is not always 100% reliable.

- **Intestinal Roundworms:** Not commonly found in small animals, but possible. These worms can be spread to people by ingesting eggs from surfaces contaminated by infected feces. In people, the worm larva can become lost and end up in the lungs, liver, heart, eye, or central nervous system, and cause various clinical signs, ranging in severity from mild to life-threatening.

6. Prevention

The good news is that most zoonoses can be prevented by taking simple precautionary actions. What the OHS does to reduce zoonotic risk:

- Treats animals for common parasites (intestinal worms, fleas)
- Performs a full health exam of each animal upon arrival at the shelter
- Isolates clinically infectious animals
- Follows a strict sanitation protocol
- Provides training and education for volunteers
- Reduces the risk of bite and scratch wounds by temperament-testing animals, identifying possible aggressive animals with warning cards on their cage/run, and trimming nails
- Follows proper health and safety protocol in the event of a bite or scratch
- Limits the amount of exposure that volunteers have to animals of unknown temperament or background

7. Protect Yourself

- WASH YOUR HANDS!!! After touching each animal and before leaving the shelter or touching your face.
- Talk to your doctor to identify your personal risk factors.
- Follow this and other procedures provided to you.

Clean hands before and after handling animals or items in the animals’ environment.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers:

- Can be used when hands are not visibly soiled;
- Provide a rapid kill of most transient microorganisms but are not recommended when risks of ringworm are significant.

Follow These Steps:

- Ensure hands are visibly clean (if soiled, follow hand washing steps);
- Apply 1 to 2 full pumps of product;
- Spread product over all surfaces of hands, concentrating on fingertips, between fingers, back of hands, and base of thumbs (most commonly missed areas);
- Rub hands until product is dry, for a **minimum of 15 to 20 seconds**.

Soap and water are recommended when significant soiling or risk is present, **follow these steps**:

- Wet hands with warm (not hot) water;
- Apply liquid or foam soap 1-2 full pumps;
- Vigorously lather all surfaces of hands for a **minimum of 15 seconds**;
- Removal of bacteria requires a minimum of 15 seconds mechanical action;
- Pay particular attention to fingertips, between fingers, backs of hands and base of the thumbs (most commonly missed areas);
- Dry hands thoroughly.

What you can do to protect your family at home:

- Ensure that your pets are up to date on their routine vaccinations and parasite control.
- Ensure that all members of your family wash their hands after handling a foster animal.
- Clean the cage on a frequent basis.

### 8. Contaminated Home Environments

Different illnesses require different disinfection protocols. Some illnesses, such as ringworm, can contaminate your home environment for an extended period of time. Should your home end up contaminated, the foster department will provide you with additional information on how to properly disinfect your home.
Appendix A: Foster Volunteer Department Manual Acknowledgment

I have read and understand the *Ottawa Humane Society’s volunteer department small animal foster volunteer manual*. This information is intended to explain the procedures of the foster volunteer program and to provide health and safety guidelines so that volunteers have a positive experience, in a safe environment.

I understand that new volunteer or workplace policies may be created and that existing policies are subject to revision at any time.

By signing below, I agree that I have read and understand the *Ottawa Humane Society’s volunteer department small animal foster volunteer manual* for volunteers in its entirety and am aware that I am responsible for following all volunteer policies regarding participating in the foster program.

Direct any questions about the *Ottawa Humane Society’s volunteer department small animal foster volunteer manual* to the CSR: Foster.

_____________________________  ______________________________
Print Name                              Signature

_____________________________
Date