

Pocket Pets

The phrase "pocket pets" refers to animals that are small enough to fit inside your pocket or a small cage. Examples include gerbils, hamsters, rats, mice, guinea pigs, and rabbits. Although cute and cuddly, these animals can occasionally transmit infectious diseases. Of special concern is salmonella, a germ that can cause infectious diarrhea. Pocket pets can carry this germ in their stool even while not appearing ill.

In order to prevent being infected by a germ from a pocket pet, certain precautions need to be followed when selecting and caring for them. If an animal appears ill or has diarrhea, do not select any animal from its cage for a pet. Furthermore do not select an animal that appears tired or quiet. These animals are more likely to be infected and sick. When caring for your pocket pets, be sure always to wash your hands after petting them, cleaning their cage, changing their bedding, or contacting their droppings. Do not eat or smoke while handling the pet. Finally, do not kiss your pet or put her close to your mouth. By following these simple rules you can safely enjoy your new pocket pet.

Resources:

"Pocket Pets", from CDC's National Center for Infectious Disease, Health Pets for Healthy People
http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/animals/pocket_pets.htm

"Outbreak of Multidrug-Resistant Salmonella Typhimurium Associated with Rodents Purchased at Retail Pet Stores --- United States, December 2003--October 2004", MMWR, May 2005
<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5417a3.htm>

Drs. Foster and Smith's (veterinarians) source for expert pet information
<http://www.peteducation.com/index.cfm?cls=18>