Small Animals Foster Care Handbook

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Introduction

Welcome to the RSPCA Victoria Foster Care Program!

Thank you for volunteering your valuable time to help us give animals a second chance.

Animals of all kinds make their way to our animal care centres for many reasons. Some wander away from home and get lost, while others are surrendered because their owners can no longer care for them. We also care for abandoned animals and those seized by our Inspectorate due to neglect and mistreatment.

Some animals that come into our care are not able to be adopted into their new “forever homes” straight away. They may be too young, unwell, recovering from surgery, or they may need training to improve their behaviour. While our animal care staff and volunteers work very hard to provide a comfortable and enriching environment, many of the more vulnerable animals are stressed by the experience of being in a shelter environment. These animals recover and develop much more successfully when they are fostered in a home environment until they are ready to be permanently rehomed.

The information in this handbook will help you to care for your foster rabbits and guinea pigs. We hope that you will keep this handbook in a handy place and regularly refer to it. At the end of this handbook, we have included contact details for our team that supports the foster care program, so please do not hesitate to contact us if you are unsure of anything or if we can be of any help.

Thank you again for your commitment and for helping give RSPCA Victoria foster animals a second chance.
1. Is Fostering for You?

There are many things to consider when deciding to foster an animal. Foster carers must:

- Be at least 18 years old.
- Complete a foster care application and sign a Foster Care Agreement.
- Be able to set aside time at regular intervals to bring your foster animal in to an RSPCA Victoria site for check-ups, vaccinations and spay/neuter surgery.
- Take on the responsibility for routine care in your home during the foster period.
- Isolate foster animals from existing family pets within the home (e.g. laundry or spare bathroom), as required (at least initially).
- Quarantine foster animals in an isolated part of your house (e.g. safe room) to prevent disease spread, as required.
- Safety proof your home to reduce potential safety hazards.
- Maintain a peaceful, loving environment for the foster animals and spend quality time socialising them.
- Maintain communication with the Foster Care Network Team.
- Commit to the nominated foster period required. Advise the Foster Care Network Team if your foster care availability changes.

In addition:

- Existing animals in your home must be up to date with vaccinations and in good health.
- Every family member in the household will need to be prepared for the commitment and emotions involved with fostering.

The table below gives an indication of the time commitment that may be required by foster carers for small animals. **Note: all times are approximate and will vary between foster animal.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Foster Animal</th>
<th>Foster Period Required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rabbit - male</td>
<td>Until testicles have descended and animal weighs 700g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbit - female</td>
<td>Until 4 months of age (or 850g if age unknown)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea Pig – male</td>
<td>Until testicles have descended and animal weighs 600g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea Pig - female</td>
<td>Until 5 months of age (or 650g if age unknown)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbits or guinea pigs for health or behavioural reasons</td>
<td>Assessed on a case by case basis and will vary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferrets/rats/other (for both male and female)</td>
<td>Until animal is at least 10 weeks of age (which will be assessed on a case by case basis)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.1 Your Role as a Foster Carer

As a foster carer, you will help offer RSPCA Victoria foster animals a second chance by providing a safe, enriching and loving home environment. You will be supported to provide high quality animal care, as well as socialisation and environmental enrichment to help foster animals grow strong and healthy so they can be considered for adoption. Our Foster Care Agreement includes detailed instructions for the veterinary and general care of the animal in foster.

We couldn’t help so many animals without the valued support and commitment of our foster carers. As a foster carer, you are a valued ambassador for RSPCA Victoria. By joining our team, you are agreeing to uphold the legislation governing our work, the [Code of Practice for the Management of Dogs and Cats in Shelters and...](#)
Pounds. The requirements of the Code of Practice related to foster care are summarised throughout this handbook. **It’s critical that the person named on the Foster Agreement Form abides by this code as they are responsible for the foster animal’s care.**

Returning your foster animals can be the trickiest part of the process and where possible, we’ll keep you informed of your animals’ progress. Please rest assured every decision we make regarding your foster animals always prioritises their welfare.

As a Volunteer with RSPCA Victoria, foster carers can seek assistance from Converge International’s employee assistance program on 1300 687 327 or via www.convergeinternational.com.au should you need assistance with any issues that may arise during the animal’s foster placement.

We understand that sometimes, friends or family can fall in love with your foster animal. We certainly welcome them to express their interest in adopting your foster animal after they have been returned to RSPCA Victoria. Matching the ‘pawfect’ pet with their forever home is the responsibility of our expert adoption team, so your foster animals are in good hands!

1.2 RSPCA Victoria Foster Carer Facebook Group

RSPCA Victoria Foster carers can post and comment in the RSPCA Victoria Foster Carers Facebook group and share photos of their foster animal and their foster care experiences with other foster carers. Please be aware that some foster animals cannot be photographed or shared on social media. The Foster Care Network Team will advise you if this is the case for your foster animal.

The Facebook group provides foster carers with a support network and an opportunity to share experiences and learn from other foster carers.

To be part of this group, foster carers must abide by RSPCA Victoria’s Social Media Policy and the RSPCA Victoria Code of Conduct. Members of the RSPCA Victoria Foster Carers Facebook Group who don’t comply with this Policy will be removed from the group.

Please note: this Facebook page is NOT intended for you to obtain medical advice. Any health issues experienced with a foster animal must be discussed with the Foster Care Network Team.

2. Preparing for Your Foster Animal

2.1 Equipment List

You will be supplied with all of the equipment and products needed to care for your foster animal/s, including:

- Food, hay
- Carry cage & bedding
- Food and water bowls
- Litter tray
- Toys

2.2 Preparing a Safe Room

The safe room

It’s important that rabbits and guinea pigs have a place in which they are safe and feel secure. Choose one room in your house to be the ‘safe room’ where your rabbit or guinea pig will primarily be housed. This room will need to be made safe and the foster animal will spend their first few days in here. Later, the rabbits and guinea pigs
may be allowed access to other parts of the house (under supervision and confined), but they must be restricted to this room at night and whenever you leave the house. **No other pets should have access to this room.**

Your safe room needs to withstand litter tray accidents and any other mess the animals may make. We suggest using a bathroom because there aren’t any large appliances they can hide under or behind, and you can easily clean the floors.

If you use a spare bedroom, consider removing legs from the mattress base or removing the bed to prevent rabbits or guinea pigs from hiding or soiling the bed.

If you use a room that is carpeted, consider buying some linoleum, which can be temporarily placed on the floor. It is easy to clean and can be disinfected and used for subsequent foster animals. It is also best to remove breakable items from the safe room, so the foster animals don’t damage them (or themselves in an accident).

**Remember: foster rabbits, guinea pigs and other small animals must be kept indoors at all times!!**

**Rabbit and Guinea Pig Proofing**

In the safe room, remember to block escape routes and remove anything that is sharp, toxic or may present a choking or electrocution hazard. Here are some tips:

- Unplug electrical devices so there are no cords to chew and block electrical outlets.
- Put away anything a rabbit or guinea pig may get tangled in.
- Tie up the cords from blinds.
- Block any holes or gaps that a rabbit or guinea pig may get stuck in.
- Check that fly screens are firmly secured and in good condition.
- Make sure the toilet lid is closed and that family members are aware of the need to close it.
- Make sure drain covers in showers or on bathroom floors are secure and cannot be lifted and that vent covers for ducted heating are securely screwed in.
- Remove any medications.

**Inside the safe room**

When the rabbit or guinea pig comes home, leave them in their carrier until you have finished setting up the safe room with the equipment you have been provided:

- Create distinct zones for sleeping, eating, toileting and playing. Put litter trays in a corner as far away as possible from their food and bedding.
- Put down a shallow bowl of water and some food (as outlined in your Foster Care Agreement).
- Provide a litter tray for the rabbit or guinea pig. We recommend one litter tray for every two animals.
- Set up a play area with a variety of fun toys.
- Establish the sleeping area. You will need to make sure the hide or their carrier cage (with door removed or wedged open) is available as a bed for them, but they will need other sleeping places close by.
A cardboard box with bedding can make a good, secure sleeping place with a few modifications to allow rabbits or guinea pigs to access it. If the rabbit or guinea pig is in a bathroom, which may become cold overnight, place folded towels under their beds for extra warmth.

Never try to pull your foster animal out of hiding. Instead, use toys or treats to encourage them to come out. If the foster animal still won’t come out, let them be. Foster animals need time to adjust to an unfamiliar environment.

3. Collecting Your Foster Animal

Approved foster carers can view and select animals available for foster at http://rspcavic.org/adoption/fostering/. If the timing is right for you and we have an animal that matches your needs, we will contact you to discuss your selection/s and arrange for you to come to an RSPCA Victoria animal care centre and pick them up.

When you visit RSPCA Victoria, you will meet with the Foster Care Network Coordinator who will provide you with the equipment and supplies you need. They will talk through the Foster Care Agreement with you and you will be asked to sign it. You will also be asked to sign the Volunteer Agreement Form if you haven’t already signed it. You will receive the following documents when you pick up your foster animal:

- Foster Care Agreement
- All relevant information about caring for your foster animal

3.1 Travelling Safely with Animals

In accordance with the RSPCA Victoria Safe Driving & Fatigue Management Quick Reference Guide and RSPCA Victoria Transportation of Animals Procedure, animals must be appropriately contained or restrained whilst travelling in a vehicle, both for the animal’s protection and the driver. Animals must not travel in the front seat of a vehicle or the front cabin of a vehicle unless contained in a suitable container (eg. cat carrier). In hot weather, for the safety of your foster animal, please ensure you have a fully air-conditioned car to transport them home.

4. Rabbit Breeds

**Dwarf Rabbits**

- This breed is not ideal for young children as they are very active, can be temperamental and their fragile build means they are easily damaged if dropped.
- They tend to be aloof but will bond closely to one person which can make them ideal pets for teenagers.
New Zealand Giant

- Giant breeds are more suited to children as their large size means they are more robust.
- They tend to have a quiet nature, preferring to sit and observe.
- Most commercially available hutches are not big enough to accommodate the larger rabbit breeds. For this reason, they are best suited as an indoor house bunny where they can roam around rabbit-proofed living areas.
- **Outdoor access must be supervised & confined to a playpen at all times.**

Lop Rabbits

- Medium size lops are good interactive bunnies and are the most likely to tolerate cuddles.
- Lops are lap rabbits so can make great family pets.
- Their shorter facial structure can make them more prone to dental problems so teeth should be closely monitored.

Dutch

- Dutch rabbits are a medium sized breed originating in Holland but developed in England and are now popular pets worldwide.
- They have distinctive markings coming in a range of colours but most often seen in tuxedo-like black and white. The markings consist of a white blaze in a coloured face and ears, white shoulders and chest contrasting with coloured hind-quarters and half white and half coloured back legs.
- Dutch are suited to children and make great family pets as they are a hardy breed with a docile temperament, are playful, inquisitive and intelligent.

Rex

- Rexes are a medium size rabbit and are characterised by their unusual soft, short, velvet like coats.
- They are interactive and quite ‘dog like’ in that they enjoy following their owners around the house and garden.
- They prefer larger cages to allow them space to roam and exercise.
Angora

- Angoras are a breed of Rabbit known for their long, fine fluffy coats.
- They must have their coat thoroughly brushed out at least twice a week.
- Keeping them well-groomed is the biggest chore in order to maintain a coat that is matt-free and clean.
- Angora rabbits can die from woolblock (ingesting their fur). While cats and dogs can vomit when they have a hairball, rabbits cannot. One of the first signs of woolblock is a loss of appetite and/or the size of the droppings gets smaller than usual for that particular rabbit.
- Woolblock is prevented by grooming regularly to ensure that loose hairs are brushed out and not swallowed.
- The long coat of an Angora rabbit can also pick up grass seeds and other debris and is prone to soiling when the rabbit goes to the toilet. For these reasons, it is recommended Angoras are kept as indoor rabbits where they can be litter trained and will stay clean.

5. Guinea Pig Breeds

There are many different breeds of guinea pig and they are commonly categorised as smooth coated, long coated, rough coated and hairless breeds. The following outlines the physical characteristics, behavioural characteristics and grooming requirements of most guinea pigs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHORT HAIED</th>
<th>PERUVIAN</th>
<th>ABYSSINIAN</th>
<th>REX</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short, smooth fur.</td>
<td>Long, sweeping</td>
<td>Short hair with</td>
<td>Short coat with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coat is frequently</td>
<td>coat which often</td>
<td>many rosettes over</td>
<td>crimped fur. Curly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a solid colour.</td>
<td>parts along the</td>
<td>the body.</td>
<td>whiskers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>spine. Fringe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>over the face.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rosettes (swirls)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on rump.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1 Guinea Pig Physical Characteristics

- Guinea pigs are stocky tailless little animals that have rounded, virtually hairless ears, large round eyes set to the sides of their heads.
- They have 20 teeth that are all open rooted as well as four front feet toes, and three hind foot toes.
- They have one pair of mammae and scent glands located around their anus and back.
• Depending on breed of the guinea pig, they have several types of hair. There are several types of coat colour and patterns.
• Guinea pigs have large guard hairs in their coat with a soft undercoat.

5.2 Guinea Pig Behavioural Characteristics

• Guinea pigs express themselves via their behaviours and sounds so it is recommended they are fostered in pairs, so they have each other to talk to and chatter.
• Guinea pigs are diurnal animals meaning they’re awake in the hours we are.
• They are gentle creatures and are unlikely to bite, making them easy to handle.
• Guinea pigs have several funny little behaviours making them interesting and quirky little creatures to live with.
• It is important to observe the guinea pig to know what is normal for them. This will enable you to know when they are acting abnormally and possibly unwell.
• Guinea pigs will initially be shy until they become accustomed to their owners and humans in general. Guinea pigs are quite vocal animals and when they’re used to people will often whistle and squeak to show their delight.
• Squealing is the most common vocalisation you will hear from your guinea pigs. They may use this to get attention, or when they are hungry. Some guinea pigs do this when they have been mishandled or mistreated. If you spend time with your pet, you will get to hear much more of their language.
• Motor-boating is a cheerful vocalisation content guinea pigs often exhibit as they are exploring.
• Pop corning is a little dance that guinea pigs do when they’re happy. This can include jumping and shivers, leaps and skips.
• Rumble strutting is when the guinea pig sways from side to side making a low purring-rumbling noise. This is used to intimidate or attract a mate.
• Dominance behaviours include swaying, rearing up, fluffing themselves up, teeth chattering, expansive yawning, nose and chin rising. Watch out for these behaviours between guinea pigs as it can result in a fight.
• If your guinea pig is comfortable and happy with his surroundings, he is likely to be at ease and will perhaps lay down in his cage or a comfy spot around the home.

5.3 Guinea Pig Grooming Requirements

• Whilst guinea pigs do respond to grooming, constant grooming and affection is not enjoyable for a guinea pig.
• Caring for a short haired guinea pigs coat is simple and occasional brushing with a soft brush (eg. A baby’s brush) will keep the coat looking nice.
• Long haired guinea pigs require much more work, needing a daily brush.
• Guinea pigs have nails that need to be trimmed regularly to prevent them overgrowing and causing your guinea pig lameness. A vet can demonstrate how to do this without cutting into the quick (the blood vessel running in the nail).
• All the teeth in a guinea pigs mouth are open rooted, meaning that they continuously grow. They have 4 incisors, 2 on the top and 2 on the bottom, which only have nerves at the very base of them. They then have a gap, called a ‘diastema’ where the canine and rostral premolar teeth once resided. They also have a pair of upper and lower premolars and 3 pairs of upper and lower molars, making a total of 20 teeth. It is important to check your guinea pig’s teeth regularly as overgrown teeth will cause discomfort and disease which needs to be seen by a veterinarian.
• Guinea pig teeth are naturally worn down by eating, such that both top and bottom incisors should match up in length and show no signs of deterioration. If they don’t, your guinea pig should be checked by a Veterinarian.
• Signs your guinea pig might have a tooth issue and need veterinary assistance may include:
  o Hesitation or obvious pain when chewing food.
  o Cuts, sores or abscesses on or in the mouth
  o Visibly overlong teeth
  o Refusal to eat
  o Weight loss
6. Feeding Your Rabbit

Rabbits and Guinea pigs are herbivorous animals and require a diet high in fibre to maintain good dental and gastrointestinal health. Feeding the appropriate diet to these animals is a vital part of ongoing and preventative health care.

Rabbits and guinea pigs are animals that conduct coprophagy, (i.e. the production and re-ingestion of soft faeces). Cecotropes, also called ‘night faeces’ or ‘soft faeces,’ are the material resulting from the fermentation of food in a part of the digestive system. Cecotropes are nutrient-rich and passed out the body like faeces but are re-ingested so the nutrients can be absorbed.

In addition, guinea pigs have a dietary requirement for vitamin C, which may not be available in sufficient quantities in pellets and hay, therefore guinea pigs require fresh food every day.

Consequences of a poor diet include:

- Gastrointestinal stasis – symptom displayed as lack of faeces production
- Overgrown molars – abscesses form in the mouth
- Obesity
- Boredom
- Diarrhoea or soft faeces
- Scurvy (Guinea pigs only)

Some animals have never seen hay and don’t know it is food and these animals will need a number of days/weeks to learn about proper diet.

Any rabbit or guinea pig who is suspected of not eating for 10-12 hours (regardless of the reason) is at risk of life threatening gastrointestinal stasis and should be presented to a Vet immediately - force feeding should be undertaken, and an underlying cause investigated.

Please contact the Foster Care Network Team Coordinator immediately if you suspect your foster rabbit or guinea pig hasn’t eaten for 10-12 hours.

Faeces out can be used as an indicator of food in and is an easy way to determine if a rabbit or guinea pig is eating. Any changes in size, shape, consistency, frequency or number of faecal pellets should be brought to the attention of the Foster Care Network Coordinator. Healthy rabbits and guinea pigs should be dropping >80-100 faecal pellets daily.
Hay

High-quality hay should make up the majority of the diet and be provided to the animal morning and evening, as these are their peak feeding times. A general guideline is to feed at least an amount of hay similar to the size of each animal.

Hays may be divided amongst grasses (e.g. Timothy, orchard grass, oaten, ryegrass, meadow) and legumes (e.g. lucerne, clover). Grass hays are the best to feed as a maintenance diet for adult rabbits and guinea pigs as they are high in fibre and lower in protein. Legume hays should not be fed as a maintenance diet as they can predispose animals to gastrointestinal stasis, obesity and formation of kidney or bladder stones.

The quality of hay varies and RSPCA Victoria will provide you with good quality hay for your foster rabbit or guinea pig. High-quality hay has been cut when the plant is young and growing and consists of green, leafy material with minimal stems; small numbers of flowers and young seed heads may also be present. The hay should feel soft, smell fresh and sweet, and be free of invading weeds, roots and dirt.

Poorer quality hays will be evident by brown to yellow colouring and greater stem content; they may be dusty and crumbly. Moist, mouldy or otherwise contaminated hays should never be purchased. Hay must be stored in dry, cool and dark conditions.

Straw is not the same as hay. Straw has minimal nutritional value as it is a waste product of grain harvest and consists of the dried stems of mature wheat with some seed heads. Although the animals will chew and eat parts of it, it is to be provided as bedding only and is not part of the animals’ diet. Straw does provide important enrichment and comfort for the animals and therefore should be maintained in a clean, fresh state, free of contaminants and spoilage.

Grass and Herbs

Fresh grass and herbs are the best and most natural food for rabbits and guinea pigs. Fresh grass and herbs should be the first food choice wherever possible. Most grass varieties commonly found are suitable for feeding rabbits and guinea pigs including kikuyu, ryegrass and wild oats. Other suitable herbs are dandelions and milk thistle. Sources should be clean, free from herbicides, pet urine and faeces contamination, and the plant should be harvested at the young, growing stage.
Fresh Vegetables

Fresh green leafy vegetables should be offered morning and evening at a volume of approximately one to two cups per day, per animal. Ideally three or four varieties of vegetable should be fed each day though vegetables known to be high in oxalic acid are best limited to one type per day.

**IMPORTANT:** Avoid feeding iceberg lettuce (light green and white lettuce) because it will give your rabbit or guinea pig diarrhoea.

Acceptable Green Leafy Vegetables

1. Leafy Greens (low in oxalic acid)
   a. Arugula, Rocket (only occasionally as is high in calcium and too much can cause bladder problems), Endive, Escarole, Frisee Lettuce
   b. Carrot tops
   c. Kale (all types)
   d. Turnip greens, Dandelion greens
   e. Herbs: Mint Basil, Coriander, Dill leaves
   f. Asian greens: Bok Choy, Yu Choy
   g. Fennel (the leafy tops as well as the base)

2. Leafy Greens (higher in oxalic acid) – limit to one type per day
   a. Parsley
   b. Mustard greens
   c. Beet greens
   d. Swiss chard/Silverbeet
   e. Radish tops

Other Fresh Vegetables

3. Limit to one tablespoon per day, per kg of rabbit/Guinea pig
   a. Carrots
   b. Broccoli (leaves and stems), Broccolini
   c. Edible flowers (roses, nasturtiums, pansies, hibiscus)
   d. Celery
   e. Capsicum (any colour)
   f. Brussel sprouts, Cabbage (any type)
   g. Summer squash, Zucchini squash

Vegetables may need to be purchased every second day and stored in plastic bags or containers in the fridge to maintain freshness. Animals will reject yellowing and wilted leaves so these should not be fed.

**Pellets**

**NOTE:** Excessive feeding of pellets can contribute to gastrointestinal stasis and lead to obesity.
Animals that are supplied with sufficient quantities of hay, grass and fresh vegetables do not require any pellets. Pellets do not cause the rabbit/guinea pig to chew with the full range of motion required for proper tooth wear hence dental problems often result.

If fed, pellets must be limited to a maximum of one tablespoon per day though rabbits larger than 3kg may have two tablespoons daily. Pellets should not be available to feed on all day.

Please refer to your Foster Agreement Form that outlines how to feed your foster rabbit or guinea pig.

Pellets should have a minimum crude fibre of 18%, and are ideally grass or Timothy based, not Lucerne, though Lucerne based pellets may be appropriate for underweight animals or those with increased calorie requirements, to help them regain a healthy weight.

Pellets mixed with seeds, grains and treats should never be given as this allows selective feeding of high carbohydrate items which may cause serious gastrointestinal stasis. Rabbits and guinea pigs are not designed to eat seeds.

Fruits - note the variance between rabbits and guinea pigs

Fruit should be reserved as a special treat or training treat, they are not to be fed every day. Fruit should only be fed to healthy animals with no recent history of gastrointestinal stasis. A maximum of one teaspoon per kg, per day may be fed.

   a. Apple, Pear
   b. Cherries
   c. Banana - 1cm thick slice, peel removed
   d. Peach, Plum, Nectarine, Apricot
   e. Kiwi
   f. Mango, Papaya
   g. Berries (any type)
   h. Melons (any - can include peel and seeds)

7. Feeding Your Guinea Pig

Guinea pigs are fastidious eaters who develop particular food preferences very early in life. For this reason, changes to diet must be made very slowly and the animals monitored as they are known to go on “hunger strikes” if presented with unfamiliar or different foods. Even changing a brand of pellets or changes in water flavour can lead to the development of anorexia.

Guinea pigs must have a source of pre-formed vitamin C in their diet as they are unable to synthesize it from glucose as rabbits can. Normal, healthy adult guinea pigs require 10mg per kg of body weight per day to prevent scurvy. Growing, pregnant or lactating animals require approximately 30mg per kg of body weight per day and animals which are ill or deficient require up to 50mg per kg of body weight per day. When compared with rabbits, due to their requirement for vitamin C, guinea pigs have a relatively higher tolerance for foods high vitamin C, including fruits.
Hay and Grass (provided by RSPCA Victoria for foster rabbits and guinea pigs)

- The majority of a guinea pig’s diet should consist of fresh pasture hay or grass hay.
- Provide your guinea pig with enough hay to fill a litter tray each day.
- Ensure that you throw away old hay everyday as the guinea pig will also use it to toilet in.
- These hays are different from straw. Straw is a good form of bedding but contains no nutritional value.
- It is very important to provide plenty of fresh grass too! Make sure the grass has not been sprayed with any chemicals like weed killer.

Vegetables

- 10-20% of a guinea pig’s diet should consist of fresh, green, leafy vegetables.
- This is roughly 2 cups of veggies per 1 kg of guinea pig, per day.
- If your guinea pig weighs about 2kg, he would need to have 4 cups of veggies each day.
- Healthy vegetables for guinea pigs include:
  - Asian greens such as bok choy
  - Carrot tops - the green part
  - Celery - especially the leaves
  - Silver beet
  - Chicory
  - Endive
  - Kale
  - Leaves from broccoli and cauliflower
  - Dark coloured lettuces and purple lettuces
  - Herbs such as mint, coriander and parsley

1. Capsicum (any colour): these are an excellent source of vitamin C and can be fed at a rate of 1/8 – 1/4 of a capsicum per animal, per day
2. A daily serving of approximately one teaspoon may be fed (listed in order of Vitamin C concentration)
   a. Kiwi
   b. Papaya
   c. Strawberries
   d. Citrus
   e. Rockmelon
   f. Mango
   g. Melons (any - can include peel and seeds)
   h. Banana
   i. Cherries
   j. Berries (any type)
   k. Peach, Plum, Nectarine, Apricot
   l. Apple, Pear
Foods to AVOID!

Mouldy or soiled hay
Peanuts
Lettuce
Spinach or beet tops
Potatoes that have started to turn green
Chocolates and confectionary

*Always wash any veggies or fruit before offering them to your guinea pig!*

Vitamin C

Guinea pigs, unlike most other companion animals, have a requirement for vitamin C to be included in the diet. Most animals, except for some primates, fruit bats and guinea pigs, are able to synthesise their own vitamin C. Without adequate vitamin C a guinea pig will develop ‘scurvy’. This is a painful disease that causes enlargement of costochondral junctions (where bone meets the cartilage) and bone and teeth abnormalities along with inflamed gums and eventually death. Including plenty of **green leafy veggies** as well as some **carrots and broccoli** will prevent this disease.

Pellets and Treats

- Any products containing molasses should be avoided as they will cause gastrointestinal problems.
- Guinea pig mixes that look like bird seed should **not** be used.
- Pellets are the safest commercial food to feed to your foster animal; however, they should not be fed in excess as are often high in fat.
- Most pellets are a treat food. Guinea Pig mix/pellets are very sweet as they are made of chopped Lucerne hay with other yummy things like sultanas and sunflower seeds.
- If you are providing plenty of hay, grass and veggies, 1-2 tablespoons of a good quality pellet mix (such as Oxbow) is all that your guinea pig will need.

Water

All animals must have a source of fresh, clean water at all times. Rabbits have a much higher daily water intake than Guinea pigs. Sipper bottles are ideal as they can’t be spilled, soiled with food and bedding materials. Guinea pigs tend to place the end of the sipper bottles fully in their mouth which may cause a food impaction of the ball bearing at the end of the bottle nozzle therefore sipper bottles must be checked daily for proper function.

- Small animal drip bottles that clip to the side of the animal’s enclosure can help to keep the water clean.
- It is always a good idea to provide more than one water container, just in case one gets tipped over. Try a bottle and a heavy ceramic bowl and check and change your foster animal’s water every day. Dirty water can make animals sick, so make sure you clean the water containers too.
- On hot days, freeze a plastic water bottle then place it inside a sock or tea towel. When your guinea pig feels too warm he can lie against the cool bottle.

**Summary**

1. Feed large quantities of suitable hay and grass as well as fresh leafy green vegetables daily. As a minimum, the animals should have hay to nibble on at all times.
2. Offer a small amount of pellets once daily if the animals require them.
3. Consider a small amount of other vegetable matter or fruit as a treat if appropriate.
4. Fresh water must be supplied at all times in a sipper bottle and a water bowl.
5. Feed morning and evening.

8. HEALTH AND ILLNESS

- Due to rabbit and guinea pig digestive processes, they need to be constantly eating, if a rabbit or guinea pig hasn't eaten in 10-12 hours, contact the Foster Care Network Team immediately as the animal may be developing gastrointestinal stasis which is fatal.

- Dental disease and dental related problems are prevalent in rabbits.
  - Incisors and molars becoming overgrown
  - Teeth growing downwards into the jaw line, causing abscesses.
  - Misaligned/broken teeth
  - Growth of spurs on molar teeth causing mouth and tongue ulcers.

- Rabbits and guinea pigs are generally clean animals and groom themselves. If they cease grooming please contact the Foster Care Network Team immediately as this may be a sign of ill health.

- Rabbits and Guinea Pigs can suffer from urine burn from sitting in dirty enclosures on soiled bedding/newspaper. Newspaper should be changed if toileted on.

- Rabbits and guinea pigs with long fur will need regular brushing to prevent knots and matting.

- Rabbits and guinea pigs should not be housed together as they have different gut floras that can cause illness in the other species.

- Rabbits can contract upper respiratory infections which can mimic cat flu symptoms. If a rabbit develops these symptoms, please contact the Foster Care Network Team immediately.

- Rabbits and Guinea Pigs can contract ear mites, in this case revolution would be used as treatment.

Rabbits can suffer from a parasite Encephalitozoon cuniculi (E. cuniculi).

How is E. cuniculi transmitted?

Spores are shed in infected animals' urine and transmission is usually by ingestion of contaminated food or water, or less commonly by inhalation of spores. Transmission from mother to young (transplacental) also occurs so that offspring are born infected.

What symptoms and disease processes does it cause in rabbits?

If the rabbit is infected with E. cuniculi and showing clinical signs then it may exhibit any, some, or all of the following:

- Hindlimb paresis (weakness of the hindlimbs)
- Head tilt (torticollis)
- Paralysis
- Urinary incontinence and/or scalding
• Tremors
• Cataracts and lens-induced uveitis
• Collapse
• Increased thirst and urination

**If you see any of the above signs, contact the Foster Care Network Team immediately.**

**Common Health Issues for Rabbits**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISSUE</th>
<th>CAUSE</th>
<th>SIGNS + SYMPTOMS</th>
<th>TREATMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obesity</td>
<td>Inappropriate diet</td>
<td>Excessive weight</td>
<td>Review diet, quantity of food, composition of food. Provide more opportunities for exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overgrown teeth</td>
<td>Inappropriate diet</td>
<td>Weight loss, not eating, chewing strangely</td>
<td>Provide items to gnaw on. Veterinary assistance may be required to trim teeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snuffles (Pasteurellosis)</td>
<td>Pasturella bacteria infection of eyes or nose (mainly)</td>
<td>Weepy eyes, red eyes, nasal discharge, sneezing, abscesses (if other areas of body affected).</td>
<td>Veterinary antibiotics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gastrointestinal stasis</td>
<td>Dehydration and not enough fibre in diet resulting in hair and fibre clogging the digestive tract</td>
<td>Not eating, lethargy, no faeces</td>
<td>Give water and food by syringe to increase hydration. Veterinary treatment for pain relief. Surgery may be required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myxomatosis</td>
<td>Virus. Transmitted to rabbits by mosquitoes, fleas or direct contact</td>
<td>Swelling and discharge from eyes, nose and anogenital area</td>
<td>None available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calicivirus</td>
<td>Virus. Transmitted to rabbits by mosquitoes or direct contact</td>
<td>Not eating, depressed, bleeding from nose</td>
<td>Vaccination available. No treatment available once infected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. DAILY CLEANING

- Empty and wipe out all bowls with paper towel and provide fresh water, veggies and pellets.
- Remove any soiled newspaper.
- Empty dirty litter trays, spray with mild, non-scented detergent and wipe out with paper towel and replace litter.
- Change the straw and newspaper in the bedding area if soiled.
- Provide pasture hay.
- Rabbits and guinea pigs will require a full change of bedding at least once a week. This means removal of all current bedding in the enclosure, the newspaper at the bottom of the enclosure to be disposed of and the enclosure swept clean.
- Then place new newspaper lining the base of the enclosure and new bedding in the enclosure. In between this once a week clean, enclosures will require spot cleaning daily.

10. HANDLING

Rabbits and guinea pigs can be quite nervous when handled. Always treat them gently and ensure they are fully supported. It is important to train both rabbits and guinea pigs to be handled; as this will make it a more enjoyable experience for them and will also allow for a better relationship between the owner and the animal. Training for handling should be done by ensuring all handling is low stress and a pleasant experience — the use of treats and food often helps these animals to enjoy handling.

When capturing rabbits and guinea pigs, make use of their natural instinct to hide. Often, unless trained for handling, they will run to a hide when approached. Once the animal is in the hide you can capture them. Whether they are in a hide or in the open you should place your hands quickly and firmly around the body (a quick grab). Make sure you have a firm grasp of the animal before trying to pick it up. If the animal struggles and escapes allow it to settle before trying to capture it again.

When the animal is being picked up, both the body and the rear legs should be supported. The animal should be held close to you with all of its limbs supported. Do not hold rabbits and guinea pigs at heights away from you — they will become nervous and start to dislike handling as they do not feel stable. Rabbits in particular must have support on all their limbs otherwise they may kick out to try and escape your hold; this can cause injury both to you and the rabbit.

As rabbits and guinea pigs are prey animals, they often do not like being picked up as their prey flight instinct engages. They should be held and handled close to the ground or a bench so that if they escape your hold they are not able to fall any great distance. Falls from quite a low height can cause major injuries in these animals. A good strategy to engage when handling and patting these animals off the ground is to use a box. The box provides full support to the animal giving it a positive experience, and it also allows the person to pat and examine the animal in a safe manner.

- Rabbits and guinea pigs are not suited as a pet for young children (under 5 years old) as children this age tend to squeeze the animals and cause injury. They need to be held gently but securely otherwise they will struggle.
- Rabbits and Guinea Pigs are not a good idea as a first pet for children to learn on.
• Picking up and holding a rabbit involves one hand underneath the forelegs, supporting the chest, while the other hand scoops up the hind legs. A rabbit must be held against your chest when being carried.

• Rabbits will kick out with their back legs if they do not feel secure and due to the force of their kick they can break their own spine while kicking out.

• Guinea pigs should be picked up and carried in the same manner.

• While handling rabbits and guinea pigs, give them a thorough health check — observe their eyes, ears, teeth, claws and coat and body condition.

  Never pick up or restrain a rabbit by their ears as this is extremely painful for them.

11. HOUSING FOR RABBITS

If using a hutch, the hutch will need to have enough room for the rabbit to exhibit their natural behaviour including running, playing, standing up and stretching.

The following advice should be considered when homing a rabbit in a hutch:

• The floor should be made of something non-slip such as hay, straw, towels or saw dust.
• Avoid metal enclosures as they heat up very quickly.
• The hutch should have a hiding area with lots of nice bedding straw to keep your rabbit nice and comfortable.
• When the weather is hot, bring your rabbit’s home inside where it’s cooler and out of the sun.
• The rabbit’s enclosure should be fully insect proof to protect from mosquitos which can transmit a deadly disease to your rabbit called ‘Myxomatosis’.
• If you would like your rabbit to be friendly and unafraid of humans, you must spend lots of time with him each day.
• Line the bottom of the enclosure with newspaper or puppy pads.
• Place a litter tray with newspaper-based litter (i.e. Breeders Choice) in the tray, 1-2 cm deep. The reason for using this litter is crystal and clay-based litter can be harmful to rabbits and guinea pigs.
• There needs to a secluded darkened sleeping area in the enclosure for the rabbits and guinea pigs to hide in. This can take the form of a plastic castle for guinea pigs, a wooden/cardboard box shelter, or an open carry cage for rabbits. Straw may be used as bedding in this area. The shelter cannot be the litter area as they need to have a separation from their waste material.
Wooden gnawing blocks must be provided for rabbits and guinea pigs. Type of wood that are safe for rabbits and guinea pigs include maple, apple, willow, birch and kiln dried pine (fresh pine is unsafe). Tunnels and toys can be provided for enrichment. Food and water bowls need to be provided in addition to a drip water bottle that does not contact bedding or feed. Foster rabbits and guinea pigs must be housed indoors. Consider the following to make indoors safe for your foster rabbit or guinea pig:

- Safety proof your rooms including covering up electrical cords because small animals are likely to find these desirable for chewing but this is very dangerous.
- Consider using baby gates and play pens to divide the house into animal friendly and animal free zones.
- Supervise interactions between your animal and other members of the family including other pets or young children to ensure everyone is safe and happy.
- Rabbits and guinea pigs enjoy private ‘me time’. Give your animal their own hiding place or safe enclosure to go to when they have had enough of roaming the house.
- Rabbits and guinea pigs are easily litter trained. They will generally choose one or two corners to toilet in. Just place a litter tray in these areas and they will learn to go to the tray when they need the toilet. This reduces mess around the home.
- It is very important to clean your animal’s area every day.
- Due to the differences in the gut flora of rabbits and guinea pigs, it is not recommended to house them together.

12. Veterinary Care for Rabbits

Make sure your foster rabbit visits the vet for check-ups as outlined in your Foster Care Agreement. The vet will check that:

- The rabbit is de-sexed and microchipped and if not, can arrange for these procedures to be done.
- The teeth are growing normally and are not too long.
- The rabbit is vaccinated against Calicivirus, which is another disease that can harm rabbits.
- The rabbit’s skin, nails and body condition are healthy.
- If your rabbit stops eating, please seek veterinarian advice.

13. Housing for Guinea Pigs

Guinea pigs are naturally very shy creatures but with plenty of attention and effort, they will become outgoing little creatures.

Guinea pigs don’t need as much space as rabbits in terms of housing.

RSPCA Victoria foster guinea pigs must be housed indoors.

Indoor guinea pigs generally get more attention from their owners and gain more stimulation.

- An indoor cage will need to be nice and roomy for the guinea pig. A guinea pig needs at least 76cm x 91cm of cage space to remain healthy and happy.
• **Male guinea pigs need at least one square metre of cage space to prevent fights over territory.**
• Indoor housing usually consists of a plastic bottomed cage with a wire top.
• Ideally it should have access via a side door and via the top.
• It needs to be big enough to house the guinea pig’s food and water as well as having space for a nest box or bedding area.
• Double story cages will provide your animal with extra stimulation.

If there are other pets at home, the guinea pig should be placed in the designated safe room where other pets can’t access them unsupervised. A hutch or caged area may be placed straight on the floor but should be away from any heater or air-conditioning ducts, as well as draughts. The family room is an ideal position for a guinea pig hutch. Guinea pigs like to know what’s going on and their view should not be obstructed by furniture or other objects. Indoor guinea pigs also still need time out of the cage getting plenty of attention and cuddles once they’ve acclimatised to their new home.

**Accessories Checklist**

- **Water bottle**
  Ideally a combination of a water bottle and a dish should be used rather than just a dish as guinea pigs tend to tip over dishes, and play in them, making the water dirty.
- **Food bowl**
  Guinea pigs will often tip over their food if they stand on the edge of a bowl hence you need to find a good solid heavy one. The best types of bowls for a guinea pig are a heavy based ceramic bowl. Ceramic bowls are nice and sturdy, as well as being easy to clean and will be provided to you by the Foster Care Network Team (and need to be returned at the conclusion of the foster placement).
- **Hay rack**
  A hay rack is a great accessory to any hutch as it prevents your guinea pigs hay being soiled. The hay rack can also be used for placing fresh fruit and veggies in, and can be placed low in the cage, or higher, to encourage the guinea pig to stand up and stretch.
- **Bedding**
  It is important to provide your guinea pig with warm bedding on the hutch floor to absorb moisture from urine and sometimes a leaking water bottle. Ideally, the cage should be lined with a newspaper, especially if it has a mesh bottom. A thin layer of bedding can then be spread upon the bottom of the cage, with more in the nesting area. Good quality bedding (either wood, paper, fabric or hay) is necessary to ensure a guinea pig’s health as dusty bedding can cause respiratory discomfort.
- **Hidey Holes**
  Guinea pigs need a few hidey holes in their enclosure to keep them feeling safe. These can be as simple as a PVC pipe or a cardboard box, up to the more elaborate purpose-built ones. These houses can be rotated and replaced to provide the guinea pig with continued excitement and interest.
- **Toys**
  Guinea pigs are inquisitive little creatures that love anything that will make their world more exciting. Any objects they can climb on, or push around, or bump with their noses will be a delight and your guinea pig will love it! Chew proof balls, dangling objects from the roof and steps, blocks and houses will all be much appreciated by your guinea pig. The only limit is your imagination and the fact that your guinea pig will chew whatever you offer him in his cage!

**Cleaning Hutches/Cage**

One of the important jobs when caring for a guinea pig is the cleaning out of the cage. There are a number of tasks which should be undertaken.

**Daily:** water bottle is to have clean water in it and to be fully functional. Any soiled bedding should be removed as should any uneaten food.

**Weekly:** the entire cage should be cleaned out removing all bedding which should be disposed of. The bowls should be scrubbed out with a spray bottle filled with ½ plain white vinegar and ½ water solution, then wipe dry.

**Monthly:** The whole cage should get a thorough disinfection. A vinegar solution is best as it is non-toxic and safe for guinea pigs. **Do not use any products containing Lysol or Pinesol as these are toxic to guinea pigs.**
14. Exercise

We all need to run and play to keep our bodies and brains healthy. Rabbits and guinea pigs are no exception. To ensure that your rabbit or guinea pig is happy and healthy, make sure you provide them with:

- Wooden toys to chew – these keep teeth healthy and stop them growing too long.
- Hiding boxes - even a cardboard box can be great!
- Tunnels can be fun too. PVC piping is ideal.
- Treat toys like a grass/hay ball.
- You can make a hay/grass tube, using a cardboard toilet roll.
- A big play area to explore. Your rabbit needs to be able to stand up in this area too.
- You might wish to train your rabbit or guinea pig to walk on a harness and lead – remember you need to follow your animal, don’t pull them around.

15. Veterinary Care for Guinea Pigs

Common Health Issues for Guinea Pigs

Contact the Foster Care Network Team Coordinator immediately if you notice any of these symptoms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISSUE</th>
<th>CAUSE</th>
<th>SIGNS + SYMPTOMS</th>
<th>TREATMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obesity</td>
<td>Inappropriate diet</td>
<td>Excessive weight</td>
<td>Review diet, quantity of food, composition of food. Provide more opportunities for exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mites</td>
<td>Small insects living on skin</td>
<td>Scratching, fur loss, skin irritation, scabbing. Excessive quantities of mites may appear like a white powder on the fur</td>
<td>Mite killing powder or solution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overgrown teeth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISSUE</th>
<th>CAUSE</th>
<th>SIGNS + SYMPTOMS</th>
<th>TREATMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overgrown teeth</td>
<td>Inappropriate diet</td>
<td>Weight loss, not eating, chewing strangely</td>
<td>Provide items to gnaw on. Veterinary assistance may be required to trim teeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bumblefoot (Ulcerative pododermatitis)</td>
<td>Hard substrate, no cushioning underfoot. Bacterial infection in sores</td>
<td>Ulcers on feet, swollen foot pads, inflammation of bone tissue</td>
<td>Provide appropriate substrate, cleaning of wounds. Veterinary assistance to provide antibiotics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scurvy</td>
<td>Vitamin C deficiency, inappropriate diet</td>
<td>Swollen joints, lethargy, anorexia, difficulty moving, rough coat</td>
<td>Improve diet to include more natural Vitamin C. Vitamin C supplements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overgrown nails</td>
<td>Nails not trimmed or no surface available for nails to wear on</td>
<td>Difficulty walking, nails curved, nail(s) grown in to pad</td>
<td>Trim nails regularly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Signs of a Healthy Guinea Pig**

- Clear bright eyes
- Shiny coat
- Healthy parasite free skin
- Normal behaviour
- Normal movement
- Appropriate weight
- Solid stools
- No discharge from orifices
- Well aligned teeth
- Good healthy feet
- No overgrown toenails

**16. Zoonosis**

Zoonosis refers to diseases which can be transmitted from animals to humans. People who work closely with animals are at greater risk of zoonosis if strict hygiene protocols are not adhered to.

A common zoonotic disease that can be transmitted from rabbits or guinea pigs to humans is listed in the below table, the method of transmission and how to minimise the risks associated with contracting the disease.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zoonosis</th>
<th>Method of transmission</th>
<th>Prevention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leptospirosis</td>
<td>Bacterial infection. Symptoms may include headache, vomiting and abdominal pain</td>
<td>Rats, rabbits, livestock Spread via exposure to the urine of infected animals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When to Seek Medical Attention and notify the Foster Care Network Team

Seek medical attention:

- If you are concerned that you may have contracted a zoonotic disease, you should immediately see a doctor.
- As soon as possible if you have been deeply scratched or bitten, or if redness or swelling develops.

17. Returning Your Foster Animal/s

17.1 Adoption process
After your foster animals are returned to the animal care centre they will receive booster vaccinations (not guinea pigs as they're not required) and worm and flea treatments, and any surgical sutures will be removed. All animals will undergo a veterinary and behavioural assessment to ensure they are healthy and of suitable temperament for adoption.

Our animal care team will familiarise themselves with the information you have provided in your Foster Care Observation Report and the animals may be promoted on our website with a description of their personality and requirements for care. Animals will be housed in our adoption pens and will be available for the community to view. Our adoption officers will speak at length with prospective owners before carefully matching your foster animals to their new homes.

17.2 Friends and family wanting to adopt
We encourage you to talk to your friends and family about your foster animals and to notify us if anyone is interested in giving one its forever home. Once your foster animal has passed adoption testing, your friends and family are welcome to contact our adoption team to confirm if they're a 'pawfect' match.

RSPCA Victoria has a marketing strategy to help promote your foster animals to give them the best chance of finding a loving new home. Foster carers must not promote the availability of their foster animals on posters, websites or by any other means outside of their family or direct acquaintance. If you have any ideas for the promotion of your foster animal or the adoption of animals in general, you are most welcome to contact our Foster Care Network Coordinator to discuss.

18. Re-fostering
There are usually many rabbits or guinea pigs needing the nurturing care of a foster carer so if you’ve returned a foster animal, we certainly encourage you to take another.

Before you foster again, you will need to clean and disinfect everything as thoroughly as possible. The following steps will need to be taken:

- All litter trays, bowls and plastic toys must be returned to the animal care centre for disinfection when you bring your foster animals back for adoption (unless you will be continuing to foster another animal of the same animal type straight after the current foster animal).
- Any fabric toys and all bedding must be thrown out.
- All hard surfaces in your home, such as flooring and walls, must be mopped or wiped down with a hospital-grade disinfectant.

If you have used a piece of linoleum to cover carpet, this will also need to be washed with a hospital-grade disinfectant and be left to dry in the sun before being stored.

If you plan on continuing to foster rabbits or guinea pigs, you can hold onto the supplies (eg. food, bowls, litter trays and plastic toys etc). If you intend on taking a break from fostering rabbits or guinea pigs or change to
fostering a different animal type (eg. cats or dogs), you must clean, disinfect and return all animal supplies provided to you at the commencement of your foster placement.

We have a dedicated team of staff and volunteers at our animal care centres and clinics who are here to help you on your foster caring journey.

Our Foster Care Network Coordinator is responsible for coordinating our Foster Care Program. They provide direct support to our fabulous volunteer foster carers and helps match animals to carers and follows up on their progress. The Foster Care Network Team are always available to provide advice to you over the phone and answer any questions you may have.

19. Contacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Availability</th>
<th>Office number &amp; Mobile</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foster Care Network Coordinator Burwood East</td>
<td>Monday to Friday 03 9224 2565 0412 601 225 (for emergencies only, Monday-Friday 8am-5pm)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Foster_Care@rspcavic.org.au">Foster_Care@rspcavic.org.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burwood East Veterinary Clinic</td>
<td>Seven days 9224 2222 Select option 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burwood East Shelter Supervisor</td>
<td>Seven days 9224 2226</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sheltersupervisor@rspcavic.org.au">sheltersupervisor@rspcavic.org.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epping Animal Welfare Facility</td>
<td>Monday 11am-7pm Tuesday 7am-3pm Wednesday 11am-7pm Thursday 7am-3pm Friday 11am-7pm Saturday 9am-4pm Sunday 9am-4pm 03 8401 6600</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epping Animal Welfare Facility Foster Care Coordinator</td>
<td>Monday to Friday 03 8401 6605 0447 935 347</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peninsula Veterinary Clinic</td>
<td>Seven days 03 5978 6706 Select option 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peninsula Shelter Supervisor</td>
<td>Seven days 03 5978 6706 Select option 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peninsula Reception</td>
<td>Seven days 03 5978 9000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
20. Emergencies

20.1 Emergency contacts

In the event of an emergency, please refer to your current Foster Care Agreement for contact details. This document was given to you when you collected your foster animal. A list of several Animal Emergency Centres are provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergency vet</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animal Accident &amp; Emergency</td>
<td>72 Hargrave Ave, Essendon Fields</td>
<td>9379 0700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Accident &amp; Emergency</td>
<td>6 Wallace Ave, Point Cook</td>
<td>8368 7400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Emergency Centre</td>
<td>37 Blackburn Rd, Mount Waverley</td>
<td>9803 8122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Emergency Centre</td>
<td>39 McMahon Rd, Frankston</td>
<td>9770 5555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Emergency Centre</td>
<td>18 / 151-159 Princes Hwy, Hallam</td>
<td>8795 7020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20.2 Action Required for an emergency/life-threatening situation with a foster rabbit or guinea pig

If you have identified a life-threatening situation with a foster rabbit or guinea pig, refer to the table of symptoms below to determine next steps.

**Column A** – if your foster rabbit or guinea pig is showing symptoms that fall under Column A below, contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator to arrange a veterinary appointment in the next 12 to 24 hours.

**Column B** – if your foster rabbit or guinea pig is showing symptoms that fall under Column B below, contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator immediately to arrange an immediate veterinary appointment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column A</th>
<th>Column B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faeces look smaller than usual size</td>
<td>Not eating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of faecal pellets less than usual</td>
<td>Lethargic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grinding teeth (sign of pain) but still eating</td>
<td>No defecation greater than 8 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diarrhoea greater than 12 hours duration</td>
<td>Grinding teeth and not eating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sneezing or coughing</td>
<td>Distended abdomen or painful abdomen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear/yellow/green discharge from eyes or nose</td>
<td>Currently seizing or had a cluster of seizures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent Scratching, Skin or ear irritation.</td>
<td>Frequent diarrhoea or containing blood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squinting eye</td>
<td>Collapsed or unresponsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urine scalding or faecal soiling</td>
<td>Eaten toxin or noxious substance (e.g. rat poison)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible seizure</td>
<td>Difficulty breathing/laboured breathing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redness, irritation, swelling or discharge from suture line</td>
<td>Haemorrhage/white gum colour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lameness- unable to weight bear for 12 hours</td>
<td>Open wound/suspected bone fracture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in colour or smell of urine (rabbits and guinea pigs can have</td>
<td>Sudden swelling of body part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orange or red urine if they have fruits or vegetables with orange or red</td>
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<tr>
<td>pigment such as carrots)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Head tilt and/or funny eye movement but still eating</td>
<td>Head tilt and/or funny eye movement and not eating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facial swelling</td>
<td>Head tilt, funny eye movement and rolling (unable to sit or stand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappetence/eating less than usual.</td>
<td>swollen eyelids, ears and genitals (“Sleepy” appearance of eyes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maggots on body or in wound</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Contact List**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>RSPCA Burwood East</strong></th>
<th><strong>Epping Animal Welfare Facility</strong></th>
<th><strong>RSPCA Peninsula</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foster Care Network</td>
<td>Foster Care Network</td>
<td>Foster Care Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coordinator/Team</td>
<td>Coordinator/Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday to Friday</td>
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<tr>
<td>8am to 5pm</td>
<td>8am to 5pm</td>
<td>8.30am to 5pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>03 9224 2565</td>
<td>03 8401 6605 or 0447 935 347</td>
<td>03 5978 9000 or 0428 953 307</td>
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<td>Sat &amp; Sun closed (please call</td>
<td>Sat &amp; Sun closed (please call</td>
<td>Sat &amp; Sun closed (please call</td>
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<tr>
<td>03 9224 2222 for any</td>
<td>03 9224 2222 for any emergencies)</td>
<td>03 9224 2222 for any</td>
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<tr>
<td>Veterinary Clinic</td>
<td>Veterinary Clinic</td>
<td>veterinary Clinic</td>
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<td>Monday to Friday</td>
<td>Mon, Wed &amp; Friday</td>
<td>Monday to Friday</td>
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<tr>
<td>8am – 7:45pm</td>
<td>11am to 7pm</td>
<td>9am to 5pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sat &amp; Sun 8am – 5:45pm</td>
<td>Tuesday &amp; Thursday</td>
<td>Sat 9am to 3:45pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03 9224 2222</td>
<td>7am to 3pm</td>
<td>Sun 9am to 11:45am</td>
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</table>

**Medical Emergencies Outside of Business Hours**

If a life-threatening situation occurs outside of business hours, the foster carer must:

- Take the Foster Agreement Form hard copy (or soft copy on phone) and foster animal to closest Animal Emergency Centre (AEC). If foster carer is not located within 40min drive of an AEC, take foster animal/s to local 24hr vet service (in the case of out of pocket expense we will reimburse the cost).
- AEC will provide an initial consultation (this fee will be invoiced to RSPCA Vic FCNT) to assess foster animal and provide indicative cost for treatment.
- Foster carer to obtain via the AEC, advice as to whether the foster animal must be treated now or can wait until the RSPCA Victoria Vet Clinic opens.
- If AEC advise treatment is not urgent and can wait until RSPCA Vet Clinic opens, foster carer to take foster animal home and contact RSPCA Vet Clinic to make an appointment to bring foster animal to RSPCA Vet Clinic as soon as possible when next open.
• If AEC advise treatment must occur now to due to life threatening conditions, AEC must call the RSPCA Victoria Chief Vet to seek advice and approval. AEC and the Chief Vet to discuss situation over the phone with foster carer present.

• Foster carer to notify Foster Care Network Team of outcome with foster animal as soon as possible (irrespective of whether life threatening situation occurred during business hours or after hours).

• Comply with all Veterinary advice for the ongoing care and treatment of the foster animal.

20.3 What to do if a rabbit or guinea pig escapes
If you see a foster animal escape from your house and you are unable to catch it straight away, please immediately contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator for detailed advice on what to do next. Be sure to approach a rabbit or guinea pig very slowly and quietly if it is outside so you don't frighten it, otherwise it might run away. Also lock away any other resident animals if the foster animal escaped into your backyard.

If you realise a rabbit or guinea pig is missing but you have not actually seen it escape, don't panic - frightened animals have been known to hide away silently for a couple of days at a time without making an appearance.

The first thing you should do if an animal is unaccounted for is to check the external doors and windows of the house to determine how likely it is that the animal managed to get outside. If there is an obvious route of escape, such as an open door, start searching outside straight away.

If it is unlikely that the animal has escaped outside, concentrate your search inside. Start searching in the safe room and check in cupboards, drawers, backpacks and suitcases, behind and underneath furniture and any other dark, quiet, confined space you can think of. Many scared animals will come out for food at night or when it is quiet. You can try to lure the rabbit or guinea pig out by moving any other animals to a different room and leaving food in the room where you think the rabbit or guinea pig is hiding, then checking to see if it has eaten any overnight.

If, after a thorough search, you cannot find your foster rabbit or guinea pig, please contact the Foster Care Network Coordinator for further advice.

20.4 What to do if an animal passes away
Even with all the care animals receive in a foster home, sometimes, some animals do not survive. If any of your foster animals pass away, please immediately call the Foster Care Network Coordinator for support and advice. Only a very small percentage of foster animals don’t make it compared to the large numbers that get a second chance thanks to the dedication of foster carers at RSPCA Victoria. In the unlikely event that this should happen, wrap the rabbit or guinea pig in a towel and remove it from any other animals. Please contact us immediately and keep the deceased animal until you have received advice from our team.
Appendix

Appendix A: Understanding Rabbit Behaviour
Appendix B: How to Tell if Your Rabbit is Unwell
**Appendix C: RSPCA Victoria Corporate Partners & Sponsors**

RSPCA Victoria aims to build long term, mutually beneficial partnerships within the Victoria business community. Our partners share our values of accountability, professional integrity, openness and creativity and they help us achieve our vision in bold and creative ways.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Document Level &amp; Type</th>
<th>L5 Reference Guide</th>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Document Owner (Management Team or above)</td>
<td>Animal Care Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Document Reviewers</td>
<td>Foster Care Network Supervisor, Senior Communications Advisor, Chief Vet, Ops Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Approval Date</td>
<td>19/09/2018</td>
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<td>5</td>
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