

**STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES**  
**DIVISION OF COMPARATIVE MEDICINE**  
**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA**

SOP#: 100.2

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Page 1 of 5

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**TITLE:** Rabbit Husbandry  
**SCOPE:** Animal Care Personnel  
**RESPONSIBILITY:** Facility Manager, Technical Staff, Veterinary Staff  
**PURPOSE:** To Outline the Proper Procedures for Receiving, Physical Examination, Evaluating Health Status, Handling, Care and Husbandry Practices Related to Rabbits

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**I. PURPOSE**

1. To ensure the highest quality of animal health and preclude the development of spontaneous diseases or disorders, which could compromise the integrity of studies and the interpretation of results.
2. To ensure personnel handling rabbits perform their duties in a manner that complies with all current governing laws, regulations and guidelines.

**II. RESPONSIBILITY**

1. The Veterinarians oversee all aspects of animal health, and are assisted by all program staff.
2. Facility Managers ensure implementation of all procedures.

**III. PROCEDURES**

1. Receipt
  - a. Individual cage cards are prepared for each animal and include the following information:
    1. Investigator
    2. IACUC #
    3. Species
    4. Sex
    5. DOB (or age on arrival if unavailable)
    6. Body Weight
    7. Arrival Date
    8. Source
    9. Animal Number
  - b. Individual Animal Medical Records are prepared for each animal, to include: (see **SOP #012** entitled, **Animal Medical Records**)
    1. **Arrival Status Sheet**
    2. **Progress Notes Form**
  - c. Shipping crates are inspected for signs of damage and shipment accuracy.

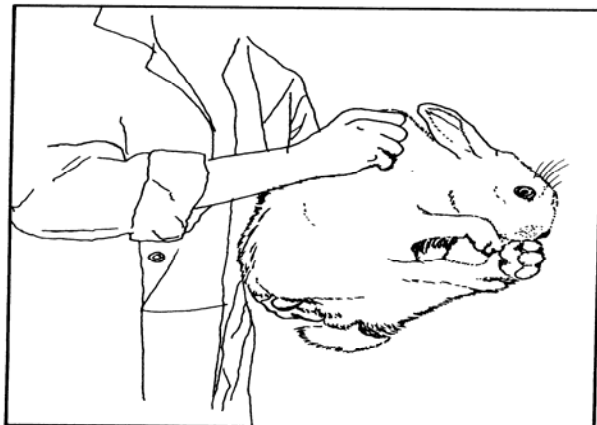
- d. Technician will notify the Facility Manager regarding any damage to crate or contents.
- e. Facility Manager will notify the Program Assistant of damaged or rejected shipments, or orders improperly filled (i.e., weight, age, number requested).
- f. Clinical Veterinarian will be immediately notified of health concerns or deaths occurring in transit.
- g. New animals are recorded on the **Per Diem Sheet** located in the **Room Log Book**.

## 2. Physical Examination

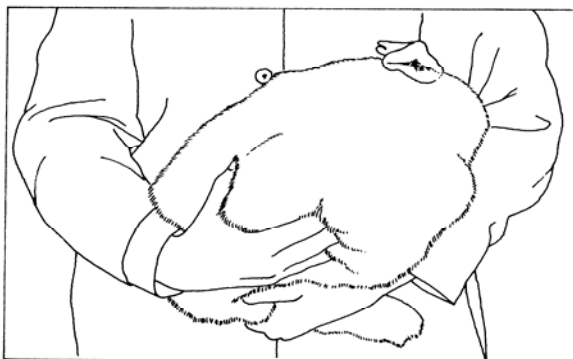
- a. A physical examination (PE)/general health evaluation is performed by the veterinary staff, or animal care staff, within 24 hours of arrival.
- b. Animal is removed from home cage and examined. Observations are recorded on the **Arrival Status Sheet**. The following parameters will be observed and recorded:
  1. ID number (if any) and or description
  2. Weight
  3. Body Temperature
  4. Heart or Pulse Rate
  5. Respiration Rate
  6. Capillary Refill Time
  7. Nails (trim if necessary)
  8. Teeth (trim if necessary)
  9. Ears
  10. Eyes
  11. Skin/Coat Condition
  12. An Impression of General Attitude and Condition
  13. Any Treatments Implemented
- c. A notation of PE having been performed is placed on the **Progress Notes** for each animal.

## 3. Handling and Restraint

- a. Removal from home cage:
  1. Grasp the scruff of the neck firmly with one hand.
  2. Support the hindquarters and back with other.



**NOTE: Failure to adequately support the hind-quarters can result in injury to the handler and rabbit!**



- b. Transporting the rabbit
    1. Place the head under the arm/elbow area.
    2. Support and control animal under hind-quarters with other hand.
  - c. Placing in restraint device or restraining for administration/collection of materials.
    1. Rabbit is held for transport.
    2. The top supporting hand is brought back up to grasp the scruff of the neck.
    3. Animal is lifted away from handler with other hand supporting the hind-quarters.
    4. Hind-quarters are gently placed with the restraint device.
    5. Head is lowered into position and device secured.
  - d. Removal from restraint device progresses opposite of above.
  - e. Return to home cage is performed in the same manner as removal from cage, in reverse (with hind-quarters entering first).
4. Feeding and Watering
- a. Refer to **SOP #022** entitled, **Feed and Bedding** for approved diets **NOTE: procedures below are not for animals on special diets or water.** Special diets must be described in an approved IACUC protocol (e.g., type, amount, and form).
  - b. Feeding on arrival:
    1. All rabbits are fed hay or hay cubes and water *ad libitum* for 5 days and given increasing amounts of Harlan Teklad Global High Fiber Rabbit Diet (#2031) as described below:
      - day 1 = day of arrival – no diet (hay and water only)
      - day 2 =  $\frac{1}{4}$  of total target diet
      - day 3 =  $\frac{1}{2}$  total target diet
      - day 4 =  $\frac{3}{4}$  total target diet
      - day 5 = full target dietIf rabbits refuse to consume hay, they may be supplemented with additional diet to ensure weight loss is minimal.
  - c. Feeding after acclimation:
    1. Rabbits under 3.5kg receive 150 grams of diet daily.

2. Rabbits equal to over 3.5kg receive 125 grams of diet daily.
  3. Orchard, timothy, or grass hay containing no or minimal amounts of alfalfa will be provided 2-3 times per week.
  4. Additional food items may be offered as enrichment when approved by the PI.
  5. Feeders are sent to cage wash for weekly sanitation.
- d. Watering:
1. Water is provided *ad libitum* by way of water bottles.
  2. Water bottles are dumped, refilled each morning, returned to same cage, and checked for adequate supply each afternoon.
  3. Water bottles, sipper tubes and stoppers are sent to cage wash for weekly sanitation.
5. Health Surveillance:
- a. Each housing room is assigned to an Animal Care Technician. Daily observations of the Animal Care Technician are recorded on the **Room Status Sheet** within the **Room Log Book**.
  - b. Surveillance frequency:
    1. On weekdays health surveillance will occur twice per day, prior to 9:30 AM, and again about mid afternoon.
    2. On weekends and holidays the initial health surveillance should take place upon the arrival of the Animal Care Technician, and again just prior to completing their assigned shift.
  - c. Observations and communications must be noted on the **Room Status Sheet** and the Facility Manager's **Animal Health and Environmental Concern Form**.
  - d. Performance of daily observations and general health surveillance
    1. Each animal/cage is observed to evaluate:
      - a. Food and water intake
      - b. Urine and fecal output
      - c. Assurance of water supply and patency
      - d. General appearance (presence of lesions/injuries, coat condition, disposition)

**NOTE: If at any time there is a medical emergency, the Clinical Veterinarian is to be notified immediately.**

- e. Weekly notation is made in the **Progress Notes** regarding animals overall status/condition. (Note: BAR = bright, alert, responsive is an acceptable entry).
- f. Health evaluations are performed monthly by either Veterinary or Animal Care Staff and the results recorded on a **Monthly Health Evaluation** label (see 2.a. above for parameters) and placed in the **Progress Notes** form in the animal's medical record.
- g. Physical examinations are performed by Veterinary Care Staff as needed, and at least every six months and the results are recorded on a **Physical Examination** label and placed in the **Progress Notes** form in the animal's medical record.
- h. Refer to **SOP #006** entitled, **Animal Health and Environmental Surveillance** for specific procedures of reporting and recording health concerns.

## 6. Cage Changing

- a. Pans and liners are changed on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in the animal room. Pan liners will be changed daily when excessively soiled. Pan changing will be noted on the **Room Status Sheet**.
- b. Racks and cages are changed weekly. Rack and cage changes will be noted on the **Room Status Sheet**. Animal will maintain its relative position on the new rack.
- c. Only one animal and its cage card will be moved at one time.

## 7. Room Duties

- a. Upon completion of cage changing, feed and watering, and daily health surveillance, the following tasks are to be performed: (Room duties described below are minimal requirements, additional duties and frequencies are at the Facility Manager's discretion)
  1. Complete **Room Status Sheet** by recording:
    - a. Minimum and maximum room temperature and humidity (measurements out of the acceptable range are described under the **Health and Environmental Concern** column of the **Room Status sheet** and reported to the Facility Manager via the **Health and Environmental Concern Form**).
    - b. Feed and water are available.
    - c. Caging and equipment changes performed.
    - d. Housekeeping duties performed.
    - e. Significant health or environmental concerns.
    - f. Time of observation and the initials of technician.
  2. Assure no investigator's supplies or trash is left in the room.
  3. Check and replenish supplies (e.g., soap, paper towels) as needed.
  4. Wipe down counter/sink areas with Sporicidin.
  5. Assure any new arrivals are recorded on **Per Diem Sheet**.
- b. Floors are to swept and mopped Monday, Wednesday, Friday or when excessively soiled.
- c. Weekly room duties include:
  1. Sanitize mop head.
  2. Sanitize enrichment items.
  3. Wipe down door and doorframe with Sporicidin.
  4. Physically count animals within the room.
- d. Semi-monthly room duties include:
  1. Sanitize all room cleaning equipment (e.g., mop, mop bucket, broom, dust pan, feed pan, etc.).
  2. Check/clean HVAC vents and replace air filters as needed.
- e. Monthly room duties include:
  1. Confirm diurnal light timers are accurately controlling animal room lights (HOB0) and record.
  2. Wash walls with Sporicidin as needed.

Approved:

Date: