

## Biosecurity to safeguard rabbit and cavy health in the showroom

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Rabbit and cavy shows across the United States and the world allow exhibitors to show their animals and compete against their fellow breeders and the Standard of Perfection. The hosts of these shows, whether they are local county shows or the national convention, are charged with providing a safe and secure location to host their event. Biosecurity is an important part of ensuring the exhibitor has a favorable experience. This article aims to educate and discuss some of those principles to consider the next time you step inside a showroom.

The USDA APHIS defines biosecurity as a series of management practices designed to prevent the introduction or spread of disease agents into, within, and out of livestock and poultry populations. Broadly, these disease agents can be classified into several categories:

- Bacterial: Respiratory pathogens (*Pasteurella*, *Bordetella*, *Staphylococcus*), Abscesses (*Staphylococcus* subspecies *zooepidemicus*), Venereal disease (*Treponema paraluis-cuniculi*), Enterotoxemia (*Clostridium*, *E. coli*)
- Viral: Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease, Myxomatosis, Shope Papillomatosis, Rotavirus
- Protozoal: Coccidiosis, Encephalitozoon cuniculi
- Fungal: Dermatophytosis (ringworm), *Malassezia*

The judging table of a typical showroom can see hundreds to thousands of rabbits pass along its surfaces over the course of a day or weekend. Maintaining appropriate biosecurity involves all participants in a show. Some key roles include:

- The show committee: These individuals must ensure that sick or diseased animals are promptly removed from the show room, appropriate measures are taken to sanitize the judging area at the time of the discovery, and equipment is appropriately sanitized after the show is complete. This includes appropriate storage.
- The exhibitor: If a sick animal is discovered prior to exhibition, the exhibitor should scratch that entry and quarantine that animal outside of the show room.
- The judge: The judge is responsible for identifying animals that are diseased and disqualifying them from competition as per the definition found in the Standard of

Perfection. Once removed from the table, the judge and show committee should ensure that the space that the diseased animal occupied is appropriately sanitized.

-The registrar: If a diseased animal is presented for registration, the registrar should deny registration and facilitate the animal to be removed from the showroom.

Sanitation of the space where a diseased animal was housed is one of the most important parts of biosecurity in the showroom. The following steps should be considered not only when sanitizing a dirty coop that previously housed a sick animal but also for cleaning the show equipment after the show is over:

-Remove organic matter. Respiratory secretions, urine, and loose stool or diarrhea should be physically removed by hand or power washer with soap and water. Rabbits and cavies frequently have sludgy urine which can dry and become concreted onto solid surfaces.

-Sanitize the equipment. Appropriate solutions which are effective include a 1:10 dilution of bleach, 1% Virkon S, and accelerated hydrogen peroxide. A general rule of thumb is to allow the disinfectant to remain on the surface for at least 10 minutes. If diarrhea or loose stool is present, disinfectants with high levels of ammonia (quaternary ammonium compounds) are effective at killing coccidia oocysts. Household names like Lysol and Chlorox can fall into this category. Because both rabbits and cavies have a very sensitive sense of smell, application of ammonia heavy disinfectants should be reserved until after the show has concluded.

-Consider the material used. In general, materials made of wood are more difficult to sanitize and deteriorate more quickly. If a host club's budget allows, consider stainless steel, hard plastic, or another composite material. Rust on metal materials is more likely to harbor infectious organisms and should be re-sealed or replaced.

-Store the equipment appropriately. Once sanitized, allow the equipment to air dry fully. Loading damp or moist tables into a trailer for six to twelve months will encourage proliferation of infectious organisms and degradation of equipment.

Finally, the individuals handling the animals should use common sense approaches to minimize spread of disease:

-Wash your hands frequently. This helps prevent disease spread between animals. If possible, supply each judge and judging table a bottle of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Judges that handle diseased animals should take a short break and use soap and water to thoroughly remove organic debris.

-Remove bedding such as shavings or hay if a diseased animal is removed from the coop. Once the material is removed, sanitize the space and replace it with new bedding.

-If a coop or holding pen has significant contamination such as diarrhea, consider marking that space as unusable and thoroughly sanitize once the show is over.

Biosecurity is an integral part to ensure a show is executed well. Remember to keep an open line of communication between all participants from the start to the end of the day!

**Sources:**

-USDA APHIS: <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/rhdv-cleaning-guidance.pdf>

-Merck Veterinary Manual: <https://www.merckvetmanual.com/exotic-and-laboratory-animals/rabbits/bacterial-and-mycotic-diseases-of-rabbits>

<https://www.merckvetmanual.com/pharmacology/antiseptics-and-disinfectants/heat-as-a-disinfectant-for-use-with-animals>

-Companion Animal Parasite Council: <https://capcvet.org/guidelines/coccidia/>

-Surface materials and cleaning efficacy in healthcare: A comprehensive review of strategies and outcomes: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.buildenv.2025.113179>