

# Prismatic Guinea Pigs – Infectious Disease Policy

## 1. Purpose

This policy sets out how Prismatic Guinea Pigs prevents, detects and manages infectious disease in guinea pigs during boarding, adapting the standards in the NSW Animal Welfare Code of Practice No. 5 (dogs and cats) to guinea pigs. The aim is to protect all boarded guinea pigs from disease, distress and injury and to provide prompt veterinary care when illness occurs. It must be noted that infectious diseases are very rare in guinea pigs, but Prismatic Guinea Pigs has developed this policy to respond in the event of an outbreak.

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to all guinea pigs boarded at Prismatic Guinea Pigs, all staff and all areas where guinea pigs are housed, exercised or handled. It should be read together with the Boarding Terms and Conditions, Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and the Uncollected Animal Policy. A copy of these documents can be found on the website at <https://prismaticguineapigs.com.au/guinea-pig-boarding-sydney/>

## 3. Disease Prevention before Admission

### 3.1 Health Declaration and Screening

Owners must confirm that their guinea pigs are healthy, eating and drinking normally, and not showing signs of illness (e.g. nasal or eye discharge, labored breathing, diarrhea, weight loss, severe itchiness or hair loss). Owners must disclose any recent illness, ongoing treatment, or recent contact with other sick guinea pigs before admission.

### 3.2 Parasites and External Checks

All guinea pigs must be free from obvious lice, mites and heavy parasite burdens on arrival.

If parasites are detected, Prismatic Guinea Pigs may provide parasite treatment at the owner's expense as a condition of continuing boarding, to protect the affected guinea pigs and others.

### 3.3 Refusal of Admission for Suspected Infectious Disease

Guinea pigs known or suspected to be suffering from an infectious or contagious disease (for example, severe respiratory disease, or severe diarrhea) will not be admitted for routine boarding.

Where a guinea pig appears unwell on arrival, staff may refuse admission, require immediate veterinary assessment, or agree to boarding only with written veterinary clearance and specific management instructions.

## 4. Housing, Hygiene and Daily monitoring

### 4.1 Housing and Separation

Guinea pigs from different households are not mixed in the same cage and are housed so that direct contact between different groups is prevented.

New arrivals are housed in clean cages with fresh bedding, water and food, and equipment is not shared between households. All equipment is cleaned and disinfected between uses.

## 4.2 Cleaning and Disinfection

Cages and bedding are kept clean to prevent disease with full bedding changes carried out every 7 days or sooner if needed. Where areas are heavily used, spot cleaning is used to remove the bedding and replace with new bedding.

Cages and surfaces are cleaned and disinfected regularly using products approved in the SOP (e.g. F10 SC for cages, Milton for bottles), following manufacturer instructions.

## 4.3 Daily Health Checks

Each guinea pig is checked at least once daily for general health, including appetite, water intake, posture, breathing, coat condition, feces and urine, and behavior.

Any change in health status (e.g. not eating, lethargy, labored breathing, abnormal discharge, diarrhea, sudden weight loss) is reported promptly to the manager and, where appropriate, to a veterinarian.

# 5. Identification and Isolation of Suspected Infectious Disease

## 5.1 Recognition of Signs

Staff monitor for signs that may suggest infectious disease, including but not limited to:

- nasal or eye discharge, sneezing, noisy or labored breathing;
- sudden change in appetite or water intake;
- acute diarrhea, especially if severe or blood-stained;
- severe itching, hair loss, crusting or skin lesions;
- sudden lethargy, weakness, or difficulty moving.

## 5.2 Immediate Isolation

Any guinea pig suspected of having an infectious disease is separated from other guinea pigs as soon as practicable, using a dedicated isolation cage and equipment.

Isolation housing is physically separated as far as possible from other boarding areas, and all equipment used for isolation is cleaned and disinfected after use.

## 5.3 Barrier and Biosecurity Measures

Staff caring for an isolated guinea pig must wash or sanitise hands before and after handling and use gloves and other barriers as appropriate.

Handling of healthy guinea pigs will occur before handling any isolated animals, to reduce the risk of spread.

# 6. Veterinary Care and Owner Communication

## 6.1 Prompt Veterinary Attention

Veterinary attention is sought for any guinea pig showing significant signs of illness, consistent with the NSW Code's requirement to obtain prompt veterinary treatment.

Where possible, the owner's nominated veterinarian is consulted; otherwise, the primary practice (Turramurra Veterinary Hospital) or 24-hour emergency provider (SASH – Specialist & 24/7 Emergency

Vets – North Ryde) is used in line with SOP and signed authorization from the Boarding Terms and Conditions.

## **6.2 Owner and Emergency Contact Communication**

The owner is informed as soon as reasonably practicable when infectious disease is suspected and is updated about veterinary recommendations and treatment.

If the owner cannot be reached, the emergency contact is contacted, and decisions are made using the authority given in the signed Boarding Terms and Conditions.

## **6.3 Treatment and Ongoing Management**

Treatment plans, including medications, supportive care and isolation periods, are followed as directed by the veterinarian.

Records of all symptoms, veterinary visits, diagnoses, treatments and outcomes are kept and provided to the owners.

# **7. Outbreak Management**

## **7.1 Definition and Response**

An “infectious disease outbreak” is suspected when two or more guinea pigs from different households show similar signs that may indicate a contagious condition (for example, respiratory signs or diarrhea) within a short timeframe.

In a suspected outbreak, Prismatic Guinea Pigs will:

- inform affected owners;
- seek veterinary advice on diagnosis, treatment and control;
- increase cleaning and disinfection frequency;
- isolate any equipment used by the infected guinea pigs; and
- review recent admission and health records to identify possible sources.

## **7.2 Admission Controls During an Outbreak**

During an outbreak, new admissions may be restricted, postponed, or require specific veterinary clearance depending on veterinary advice, to avoid introducing susceptible animals or spreading disease.

Owners with bookings will be informed if there is a known outbreak and may choose to defer boarding based on veterinary advice.

# **8. Record Keeping and Review**

## **8.1 Records**

For each suspected or confirmed infectious disease case, Prismatic Guinea Pigs keeps records of:

- animal identification and household;
- onset and description of clinical signs;
- isolation and cleaning measures used;
- veterinary consultations, diagnoses and treatments;
- communication with the owner and emergency contact;
- recovery, ongoing care or outcome.

## 8.2 Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed at least every two years, or sooner if:

- NSW legislation or Codes of Practice change;
- new RSPCA or national standards for small animal boarding are released; or
- An outbreak or incident highlights the need for improved infectious disease control.