

Pocket Pet Foster Care Manual



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Welcome

Thank you for fostering with Animal Welfare League NSW. Fostering is a rewarding experience that helps save thousands of lives each year and we could not do it without you! It involves temporarily bringing in an animal to your home until they are ready for adoption. For many people, it is your first time fostering and we hope you will love the life-saving experience. Our Foster Care Manual provides you with helpful tips to ensure success!

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Summary

- **Join our foster Facebook group:** Search '[AWL Kemps Creek Foster Carers](#)' on Facebook. Post questions, cute pics of your foster animals and to keep up-to-date.
- **Promote your foster animal** on Facebook, Instagram etc and to family/friends (remember to include microchip number if promoting for adoption!).
- For **medical issues**, contact our Kemps Creek Shelter Vet Clinic on 8777 4450. **Quote the Animal ID(s)** when booking appointments. When taking foster animal(s) to a vet, **ONLY go to our Kemps Creek Shelter Vet Clinic** and don't go to your own vet or we will be unable to pay for it. See info sheet that you get each time a foster animal is collected for approved vets for emergencies.
- It is recommended to keep rabbits and guinea pigs inside where possible, however **rabbits MUST be inside at night**, and away from mosquitos. Hot/humid weather (25 degrees +) or cold weather (under 15 degrees) will also require both guinea pigs and rabbits to be housed inside.
- Rabbits and guinea pigs should not be left free to roam outside without supervision or without a gated off pen area.
- Guinea pigs must have soft flooring. Strictly no metal or wired flooring. This is also highly recommended for rabbits.
- Read about [common diseases](#).
- When guinea pigs are 600g or rabbits are 4 months of age, healthy and friendly, call our vet clinic to book them in for desexing. Depending on pen space they may stay at the shelter for adoption post desexing. Your foster contact will let you know leading up to the appointment.
- **Naming animals:** All animals are named upon arriving at Animal Welfare League NSW. Unfortunately the names are unable to be changed as it can cause confusion with initial paperwork and other places where the names are already recorded.
- Don't give a foster animal to anyone else.
- **Adoption FAQ's & returning animals:** See [Adoption FAQ's/returning Foster Animal](#).
- If a foster animal **escapes** or **passes away**, call the Foster Care Officer immediately.
- Read the [common situations and what to do](#).

Supplies

AWL NSW supplies flea/lice prevention, as well as any medication (from our clinic) where required. Hay, pellets, litter and vegetables can be supplied by AWL NSW to start. After the initial supply, they need to be supplied by the carer.

Foster carers provide hay, species-specific pellets, enclosure and its contents, fruit, vegetables and enrichment devices.

We are unable to reimburse foster carers for expenses. Upon returning your foster animals, please return any items borrowed from AWL NSW.

If you need more medication or flea/worming treatment, fill out the Medication Refill Request form <https://awlnsw.jotform.com/222852119555862> as soon as possible.

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Feeding

Rabbits and guinea pigs should have constant access to hay (not chaff or cubes) and picked grass; alternate (depending on age or if they are fussy eaters) pellets and fruit/veggies daily. Rabbits/guinea pigs under 12 months, as well as pregnant or lactating mothers should have constant access to pellets and hay for growth and development. Common hays fed to rabbits are oaten, timothy and meadow. Stay clear of lucerne hay as it is too sugary and rich.

Sugary fruits and vegetables such as strawberries, oranges, bananas and carrots should be given in small amounts and in moderation. E.g. 1-2 times a week and only a small slice. Leafy greens are a great source of nutrients (excluding iceberg lettuce as it creates a gas build up in their gut). Spinach can be very fibrous, so should also be given in moderation, but kale, cos lettuce, cilantro, carrot tops and dandelions are all a great food source.

There are an array of pellets for rabbits but the best and most nutritious pellet brands we have used are Vetafarm Origins and Oxbow pellets.

It is a good idea to have 'critical care' available as a treat in case this needs to be given in an emergency. Monitor faeces and ensure they are in small pellets. Any variation could mean too much of a certain food or other underlying health concerns. Water should be accessible at all times through both a water bowl and bottle in case the animal has a preference.

Medical

Please do not self-diagnose or Google treatment options for your foster animal. Always speak to our vet clinic or Foster Care Officer before providing treatment or withholding treatment if you notice any health issues, no matter how minor the issue may be.

Non-emergencies that will require a call (and likely a visit within 24 hours) to our Kemps Creek vet clinic (8777 4450) include the following. Contact our clinic ASAP (and quote the Animal ID[s] when booking appointments) during opening hours if your foster animal:

- Is not eating, drinking or toileting
- Seems lethargic in any way
- Has soft stools
- Any swelling or discharge from any orifice or surgery sites
- If they've been fighting

*Quote the Animal ID of each pocket pet when booking in appointments at our vet clinic. **Do NOT take an animal to a vet that isn't an approved vet as per below. We are unable to reimburse vet bills to foster carers or other external vet clinics.***

EMERGENCIES: In a life-threatening emergency (eg. animal is lethargic or another emergency as per 'what is an emergency?' on bit.ly/arhpetemergency), call our Kemps Creek Shelter Vet Clinic immediately. If it is outside of opening hours (8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat), but it's a Sunday or public holiday 8am-midday, contact Great Western

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Animal Hospital (469 Great Western Hwy Wentworthville NSW 2145) on 9631 9322. For other times, contact one of the below approved emergency vets:

- Animal Referral Hospital Homebush (250 Parramatta Rd, Homebush) on 9758 8666
- SASH Prospect (1 Rowood Rd, Prospect) on 8609 9444
- Veterinary Specialists of Sydney (106 Parraweena Rd, Miranda) on 8376 8767

These are our only approved after hours vets and we will not reimburse anyone for taking a foster animal to another vet. **You must show the vet the foster sheet (emailed to you at time of fostering) to verify that the animal is a current AWL NSW foster animal in order for the animal to be treated at AWL NSW's cost.** From 9am the next day tell the Kemps Creek vet clinic what happened and transport the pocket pet to our Kemps Creek vet clinic ASAP if this is suggested (it is in most cases).

Before you collect your foster animal & things to know

Before you bring your foster pet(s) home, make sure that you have a suitable place for them to stay. The room/area should adhere to the following guidelines:

- The space has been and can be disinfected between foster groups.
- Separate from other household pets
- Can withstand messes: spilt water or food, vomit, litter, urine, faeces, etc.
- No breakable items or small items within reach.
- Electrical outlets and wires are blocked or out of animals' reach.
- Secured windows (closed or with a secure screen) and appliances, toilet seat down.
- No access to toxins, chemicals, food, plants or flowers that may be harmful to pets
- Provide safe, disposable or easily sanitized toys such as toilet paper rolls or wooden chew blocks
- Children under the age of 18 should not be left unsupervised with any foster pets.
- Foster carers are expected to follow & abide by all guidelines & protocols regarding proper care of foster pets including giving proper food, access to water at all times, daylight, socialization and health care. Foster pets must be kept in climate-controlled homes where the temperature is kept between 18-27 degrees Celsius.
- Only treat foster pets with medications prescribed by Animal Welfare League NSW veterinary staff. Do not use your own treatment.

Fostering pocket pets

Rabbits MUST be inside at night time and away from mosquitos. Hot/humid weather (25 degrees +) or cold weather (under 15 degrees) will also require both guinea pigs and rabbits to be housed inside. Rabbits and guinea pigs should not be left free to roam outside without supervision and without a gated off pen area. Guinea pigs must have soft flooring. Strictly no metal or wired flooring. ***Please ensure all windows are closed in any room that the foster animal can access and do not let them on the balcony.***

Pocket pet setup & quarantine

Rabbits

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It is ideal if the enclosure is inside where the rabbit can spend time with the family. Most importantly away from the weather elements and mosquitoes. The rabbit must be able to do 3 full hops down and back, as well as stand up on their back legs and not touch the roof of their enclosure. X-pens and puppy pens are great to isolate areas off for the rabbits when they are inside/free roam, but they will be able to hop over them so supervision is a must.

At night or when unsupervised, especially with other pets in the home, the rabbits should be kept safe in a large, enclosed area. Free range time and grass/outside time is important for the rabbit, but they should always be supervised to prevent them chewing on furniture or wires and getting under places they shouldn't. The flooring should not be entirely wired or concrete and they should have access to soft bedding and soft surfaces to prevent sore feet.

Guinea pigs

It is ideal if the enclosure is inside where the guinea pigs can spend time with the family, however large outside enclosures are also acceptable. It is most important that there is no wire flooring as guinea pigs do not have padding on their feet. Their feet are made from bone with a thin layer of skin, making them very susceptible to bumble foot. The flooring should not have any wire preferably and it should be a bare base straight onto grass. If on concrete or hard floors, blankets or a soft surface should be applied over the top. 2-3 guinea pigs housed together should have an enclosure space of approximately 3m². They will need supervised grass time as well as inside time. Puppy play pens are excellent to use for this. C and C cages are great guinea pig enclosures.

Daily weighing for babies

Rabbits under 2 months and guinea pigs under 600g will need daily weighing. Please contact the Foster Care Officer if there is any weight loss or when the guinea pig is close to 600g for desexing.

Vaccination, flea treatment & worming

Revolution is to be applied on the 1st of the month unless specified otherwise. For rabbits, part the fur behind the neck and between the shoulder blades to apply revolution. For guinea pigs, apply half a pipette behind each ear where there is no fur.

Pocket pet integration

Guinea pigs are prey animals and for safety and comfort, they need to live in pairs or groups. Having a single guinea pig will cause depression, stress, anxiety and lower their life expectancy. Introducing a new guinea pig or rabbit into a group or with another single one should be done similar to how new cats are introduced to existing cats.

Each animal should be either housed in separate neighbouring enclosures or split with a divider. The pocket pet should be able to smell and touch each other without the risk of fighting. Once this has happened for around 7 days and the animals seem to be sitting by each other and content with each other's company, then gradual play dates can occur in a neutral area. The neutral area should not contain either of the animal's scent, such as a

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bathroom or spare room. Ensure the space has lots of yummy treats and hay to share as well as areas to hide and nowhere for the animals to feel cornered without being able to escape.

Start with multiple short sessions (e.g. 10 mins supervised) and increase each day. As a rule of thumb, only one male should be housed with females to reduce males fighting over a mate (even when desexed). Males and females will generally bond easier, similarly with older and younger animals or bigger and smaller pocket pets as there is little competition for dominance. The animals may chase and mount each other but if this is constant, separate before an injury occurs.

Once the animals are bonded and ready to be placed in the same enclosure, make sure the enclosure is large enough and cleaned of any existing animal's scent. There should also be enough resources for each animal (so they don't have to share or potentially fight over food bowls etc). Guinea pigs should not be housed in the same enclosure with other animals, especially rabbits as larger animals can cause physical harm to the smaller guinea pigs.

Common diseases

Bumble Foot

This occurs when guinea pigs or rabbits have been standing in enclosures that are not clean or on hard flooring or wire. It generally appears as reddening and/or open sores on their feet. If left untreated, it can affect the bones causing deformities, pain and open fractures.

Gut Stasis

Guinea pigs and rabbits are "hindgut fermenters", which means they have digestive systems specialized for fermentation of plant material in their large intestine. This increases the difficulty in breaking down nutrients from food. Therefore, they must have always have access to food in order to regularly produce energy for their body. If a guinea pig or rabbit stops eating or toileting, immediately contact our vet clinic to prevent severe gut stasis.

Myxomatosis

This disease is released by the government to control wild rabbit populations; however, it also affects pet rabbits. It is carried by mosquitoes and is highly contagious among rabbits only (not to other animal species). There is currently no preventative or cure, and myxomatosis will cause a very painful death within 10-14 days once transmitted. Symptoms include swelling, discharge from all orifices, lethargy and other symptoms.

Children and pocket pets

Whilst fostering a new pet is a very exciting event for children, their enthusiasm must be supervised and controlled. It is essential that the new pocket pet is not crowded by children or forced to interact with them until the stress of being somewhere new has worn off.

Initially, ensure the interaction is with one child at a time in the room. Babies and young children should NEVER be left alone unsupervised with any animal.

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Cleaning Up Between Pocket Pet Fosters

After returning pocket pets, sanitise the fostering room(s) before putting in new fosters. Remove everything they slept on, ate from, played with and toileted in. Scrub everything they could reach (don't forget the walls) with a weak bleach solution (1 part bleach to 10 parts cold water). For any surface you don't want to risk potentially discolouring, put a drop of the bleach solution (mixed with water as per above) on the surface and check.

Food and water bowls can be washed in the dishwasher. Clean/spray the litter box and any reusable toys with the bleach solution. Wash all bedding using bleach and hot water. Throw away any toys made of cardboard or other non-cleanable materials. This should prevent any new litters from contracting anything that the previous pocket pets may have been harbouring.

After cleaning with bleach solution, remove with water. Read and follow safety and first aid information on product packaging for any chemical that is used. Additionally, wear gloves and protective glasses, keep out of reach of children, and don't inhale fumes.

Booking the animal in to the vet & appointments

When you collect foster animal(s) you'll be told when they need vet work. Call the vet clinic on 8777 4450 to book in appointments then text the Foster Care Officer to advise.

If the appointment is for vaccination, microchipping, flea treatment, worming, ringworm culture or to diagnose/treat a sick or injured animal, you'll need to stay at the vet clinic for the appointment. Appointments are available every weekday and Saturday mornings.

Surgery days are Monday-Friday and the animal(s) will need to be brought in at 8-9am on the day but they can be brought in the day before as long as you tell the vet team upon booking. Book early as vet appointments can sometimes be booked out well in advance. Pocket pets should NOT be fasted before surgery so please give them food as per normal.

Foster animal involved in a bite/attack

Call the Foster Care Officer immediately if a foster pet bites or attacks a person or pet (or gets attacked by another animal), fill out our Incident Report Form and send to the Foster Care Officer ASAP. Download the form here -> <https://bit.ly/AWLIncidentReport>

Common situations and what to do

Situation	What to do
Rabbit has given birth	Let your Foster Care Officer know as soon as you can. Ensure fur nest is in a safe place (i.e. not on top of an opening or in a high place where babies could fall out). Minimise any handling as mothers can reject their young if they have foreign smells on them. Do a daily head count and alert your Foster Care Officer of any changes. If the nest must be moved or if a baby has fallen from the nest, wear

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	<p>gloves during handling. Keep the area dark, calm and free from loud noises as stress can also cause maternal rejection.</p> <p>Once the baby rabbits have a full coat of fur, they may be handled and will need to be booked in for their first vaccinations and microchipping at 4-6 weeks of age. A gender estimate can be given as this time and confirmed at 3 months of age. Males will need to be separated from females after an estimate is given. Once the babies are interested in solids (pellets/veggies/hay), begin weaning from mum.</p>
Guinea pig has given birth	Guinea pigs are born fully formed and can eat solids almost immediately. Please alert the Foster Care Officer when babies are born and separate any other adult guinea pigs from mum and babies. A check-up will need to be booked at our vet clinic at 3 weeks of age unless there are health concerns sooner than this time. A gender estimate can be given at this time and then confirmed at 6 weeks. After an estimate is given at 3 weeks, separate males from any females immediately.
Pocket pet pair or group is fighting	Integrating pocket pets together can be very difficult and fights, if they occur, can be quite violent. Guinea pigs must be kept in pairs or groups however some rabbits are happy to be solitary animals. Please refer to integration plan if pocket pets have had to be separated and contact the Foster Care Officer for advice if required.
Pocket pet stops eating	Offer a wide variety of pellets, vegetables, fruits, hays and grasses. If the animal is still not eating, you may need to syringe feed Critical Care. If you have not done this before or not confident with doing this, please first speak to our vet clinic.
Pocket pet's teeth are overgrown	Hay, chew blocks and other toys/enrichment items (cardboard, toilet paper rolls etc) can all help with keeping teeth at a good length. However, if the teeth begin to grow too much, twist, touch the lips of the opposing side of the mouth or create any reddening/ulceration please contact our onsite veterinary clinic.
Pocket pet's nails are overgrown	Human baby nail clippers or pet clippers designed for rabbits/guinea pigs can be used to trim long nails. If you are unsure how to clip and do not have a veterinary appointment coming up where they could be cut, please watch this YouTube tutorial: How to Trim Your Guinea Pig's Nails - YouTube (if you do have a wiggly pocket pet, try wrapping them in a 'burrito wrap')
Fleas, lice or mites spotted on animal	Check with the Foster Care Officer when the last dose of revolution was given. You may need to apply another dose and remove all contents of their enclosure to be washed, disinfected and re-set. If you suspect a serious infestation, please contact our Kemps Creek Vet Clinic.
Desex site has opened up or stitches are showing	Book in an appointment with our Kemps Creek vet clinic. Keep the area clean with saline or dilute iodine (if you have neither, warm salty water is acceptable). Gently clean the area with a cotton pad.
Pocket pet is lethargic	This can be an emergency so immediately contact our vet clinic if during opening hours. Outside of our opening hours, contact one of our approved emergency vets.
I, or someone I know wants to adopt my foster animal	See Adoption FAQ's & Returning Foster Animals .

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Adoption FAQ's & Returning Foster Animals

Can I promote my foster animals on social media?

Absolutely! There may be rare cases where we don't allow it and if so, we'll let you know.

How much is the adoption fee?

Rabbits and guinea pigs are \$50 each to adopt. This includes desexing (except for female guinea pigs as the surgery risk is too high), microchipping (for rabbits only), vaccination (rabbits only and up to the adoption date) and they will be up to date with flea and worming treatment.

Can I adopt my own foster pet?

Yes, in most cases. (*For pocket pets under 4 months, skip to the section below*). The animal may need to be desexed or have other vet work done first. If a member of public contacts our shelter wanting to adopt an animal available for adoption from foster, they will have first preference so to avoid disappointment, contact the shelter on kempscreek@awlsw.com.au or 8777 4445 ASAP if you would like to adopt. Our standard adoption fee will apply.

What is the adoption process and does my animal have to go back to the shelter?

Pocket pets under 4 months

When rabbits are 4 months and over or guinea pigs are 600g or more, healthy and friendly, contact our vet clinic to book them in for desexing then text the Foster Care Officer to advise. After desexing, they may stay at the shelter for adoption depending on space availability. The Foster Care Officer will advise.

Animals currently available for adoption (excluding pocket pets under 4 months)

Animals available for adoption are on the 'Adopt' section (www.awlsw.com.au/animals) of our website. Send updated information about the animal and new photos to your Foster Care Officer to help promote the animal.

Family/Friend wants to adopt

1. They're encouraged to meet the animal at your home. They must also call our shelter on 8777 4445 for information about the history of the animal, check to see if the animal may be suitable and to confirm that the animal is still available.
2. If everyone is happy for the adoption to go ahead, contact the shelter on 8777 4445 to arrange a day/time to come to the shelter to process the adoption.

Enquiry from member of public (e.g. from AWL NSW website)

Our trained shelter staff will review adoption applicants to ensure that it may be a suitable match. It could take a day, weeks, or months for a suitable applicant to contact the shelter. When a possible forever family has spoken with us, our shelter staff will contact you with the applicant's contact details so you can contact them to discuss your foster animal, send pics/videos etc. Then you can book here bit.ly/PocketPetMeet to arrange a day/time (ideally within the next few days) with the applicant to meet at our shelter with the pocket pet. If the meet is successful, the animal will be adopted and go home with the new owner.

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Note: we adopt animals to the first suitable applicant so if another person interested meets the animal sooner, the animal may be adopted to them.

Once a member of the public enquires to adopt a foster animal, the member of the public (and not the foster carer) will have the first choice to adopt as per our process above. If you would like to adopt your foster animal, contact the shelter on 8777 4445 or kempscreek@awl.nsw.com.au beforehand (for pocket pets under 4 months, use the online booking link).

All ownership rights and decision making of the animals welfare, adoption process and veterinary needs will be made by AWL NSW. If you wish to adopt your foster animal, contact AWL NSW (if a pocket pet under 4 months then use the online booking link above). Once the animal is made available for adoption to the public online, the public will have first priority to adopt the animal if deemed suitable by us.

Animals NOT yet available for adoption (excluding pocket pets under 4 months)

Animals that haven't been desexed, are recovering from surgery, awaiting other vet work or needing extensive behaviour work are not yet available for adoption. We try to make animals available as soon as possible when they are ready medically and behaviourally. If unsure, ask the Foster Care Officer when the animal may be placed up for adoption.

I am returning a pocket pet

If you suddenly can't care for pocket pets or are going away please tell the Foster Care Officer.

Mental Health & Wellbeing Program

Whilst fostering is a fun, exciting and very rewarding experience that helps save many lives, sometimes it can be tough. Current AWL NSW foster carers can access 24-7, 365-day crisis and emergency counselling provided by www.assureprograms.com.au. It is completely free for current and active foster carers and it is a confidential service. Call 1800 808 374 anytime to access this service. Animal Welfare League NSW Company Code is: ANI2013

Foster Carers Save Lives.