

AEC STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

SOP No:	03
SOP	Guinea Pigs
Scientific Name:	<i>Cavia porcellus</i>
Category:	2 or 3
Approval Level:	Category 2: School Principal may delegate Category 3: School Principal may NOT delegate
Authority:	Government Schools – Department for Education and Childhood Development Animal Ethics Committee Independent and Catholic Schools – Non-Government Schools Animal Ethics Committee (NGSAEC)
Authority Approval Date:	1 August 2010
Last Update:	18 December 2018
Disclaimer:	<i>This document may be updated at any time. You should check the web site regularly to ensure that you are meeting the most recent recommendations. If you note any concerns with the information provided (inadequate, incorrect) please contact the relevant AEC.</i>
Licensing Requirement:	Not applicable
Compliance Requirement:	The keeping of this species requires approval from the School Principal. It is recommended that this Standard Operating Procedure be followed as a minimum in the provision of appropriate care and housing for this species.

General Information: Guinea pigs are rodents from South American origin. Sometimes referred to as Cavies. They occur in family groups sometimes in large colonies with burrow systems. They are highly vocal emitting a range of purrs, squeals, squeaks, and grunts. They are vegetarian. Three types exist English – short hair, 3-4cms, Abyssinian – short hair with raised rough rosettes and Peruvian – longhair 15cm.

All three come as single colours, bi (2) or tri (3) coloured including white, cream, ginger, red, brown or black. They have 3 digits on their hind limbs and 4 digits on their front limbs.

Physical Attributes:

- **Size (adult):** 15cm in length
- **Weight (adult):** 700 -900gms for females and 900 -1200gms for males
- **Life span:** 4 -6 years
- **Sexual maturity:** Males 4 months, females 3 -4 months
- **Gestation period:** An average of 60 -70 days.
- **Number of offspring:** Anywhere from 1 -10, average is 4 -5. Have 3 -5 litters per year. At birth they are fully mobile within 1 hour, eyes open, fur, full teeth set and weigh 100gms.

Behaviour:

- **Normal:** Guinea pigs tend to spend a lot of time hiding. As they mature they like set environments and handling. When things move or change they can become stressed and agitated and freeze their movement for lengthy periods of time.
- **Socialisation:** They are used to living in groups. One male to 3-6 females if breeding is required. Groups of single sex are fine together from a young age.
- **Activity levels (hibernation etc):** They are very busy when young but become less active as they mature. They are very messy, shredding straw and paper.

Environment:

- **Space:** Guinea pigs can have a variety of cages and sizes depending on the number kept. Outdoors they need part solid and part grazing area hutch. Adult animals need 1sq metre space per adult. A part wire base allows them to graze on lawn/grass areas. For 2 Guinea pigs a cage should be 1500mm in length and 800mm in height and width.
- **Movement:** Guinea pigs not raised in wire hutches can break their legs when first placed in wire floored hutches. They can stampede if agitated and injure themselves.

AEC STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

- **Water:** Fresh clean water must be available daily for drinking.
- **Temperature:** Outdoor hutches should be out of direct sunlight and shaded. They should be free from strong winds and weather. They require part of the hutch to be weather proof. In hot periods they should be placed under verandas. Indoor hutches should not be placed in direct sunlight and be free from draughts, fumes and away from heaters. Indoor hutches without a roof should be a minimum of 400mm in height.
- **Lighting:** Natural lighting inside and outside is sufficient.
- **Covering:** All outdoor hutches, cages and enclosures must be roofed to prevent attacks from predators.
- **Shelter:** They must have an enclosed area (with no viewing) to retreat to.
- **Cleaning:** As they are extremely messy they require daily clearing and weekly cleaning. Food containers must be cleaned daily and heavily soiled materials removed daily. Weekly all the paper, bedding straw, should be removed. The area can be cleaned with a detergent and hot water or a very mild disinfectant. Sufficient bedding straw material should be provided to allow them to tunnel and burrow under.

Feeding:

- **Diet:** Guinea pigs require a balanced diet of commercial guinea pig pellets, hay and fresh produce (carrots, lettuce, grass, kale, spinach, corn, cucumber, green feed, pumpkin, broccoli, apples, pear, oranges etc). They are fussy eaters and may refuse to eat or drink if food and containers are changed. Pellets should be stored for no more than 60 days.
- **Daily requirements:** They should be fed twice a day. They need 6gms food per 100gms body weight and 80ml of water.
- **Supplementary feeding:** Guinea pigs need a supply of vitamin C in their diet (10-30mg/kg/day). Regular greens (like kale, broccoli, brussel sprouts) and fresh pellets will assist with this. Alternatively, vitamin C powder (i.e. Value Plus Vitamin C powder) can be added to water at a rate of 200mg per litre.
- **Equipment:** Water sipper with the capacity for ½ to 1 litre of water. A pellet hopper holding sufficient pellets throughout the day. When bowls are used be aware that they will spill them and defecate and urinate in them continuously, so they will need constant cleaning and replacing.

Breeding:

- **Mating:** Males are sexually active from 3 months and will breed with any available female after each litter is born.
- **Pregnancy:** Females must be allowed to have their first litter before 6 months of age. If they are bred after this time they may not be able to give birth naturally as their pelvis can fuse. Females can continue to provide litters. The first pregnancy will take 9 weeks those following quickly after birth will take 9-11 weeks.
- **Fate planning:** Breeding stock must be re homed. As an introduced species they must NEVER be released into the environment.

Handling:

- **Human:** Guinea pigs can be handled gently and calmly to prevent distress and injury. They rarely bite or scratch but may do so if frightened.
- **Equipment:** They can be wrapped in a towel if required when handling.
- **Transporting:** They can be carried in well-ventilated carry boxes or cages that provide a place for them to hide. Transport quickly and do not leave unattended or allow them to heat. Do not transport on days that are over 32 degrees.
- **Children:** Young children should not handle Guinea pigs. Observation only. Younger children could pat them on the back while an adult holds them. With older children only one student should handle an animal in any one session.

AEC STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

They should be lifted by grasping them gently but firmly under the chest with one hand, while supporting the rear quarters with the other hand. They should be placed gently onto the ground not dropped down.

Hygiene:

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Signs of illness:

Indicators: loss of appetite, hair loss, diarrhoea, discharges, infections, coughing, gasping, growths, hair loss, scratching, limping, dribbling, and lice.

Treatments:

Assistance from a veterinarian should be sought for confirmation of conditions and treatment options.

Lice are common wherever there is considerable exchange of animals and veterinary advice should be sought as to the most appropriate treatment.

Vitamin C deficiency and/or wet cage floors will cause swelling and soreness of the feet. Vitamin C deficiency can also be the cause of hair loss and skin problems.

Euthanasia:

When an illness or injury is such that recovery is unlikely then the animal must be euthanised by a veterinarian. Any death must be reported to the Animal Ethics Committee using the appropriate form (see section relating to ADVERSE EVENTS). Forms are available on the relevant websites.

Disposal/fate planning:

When no longer required Guinea pigs must be re homed. As an introduced species they must NEVER be released into the environment. Bodies must be disposed of correctly in accordance with local council regulations.

Holiday and weekend care:

Guinea pigs generally cope with being rostered to responsible carers. They need to be checked daily and fed regularly over weekends and holiday periods if they remain on site or if they are housed outside. Records must be kept of 'off site' care. Hutches and feeding equipment and supplies must be provided to carers, with contact details for emergencies.

Approved activities:

Observation

Resources:

www.rspca.org.au
www.petplace.com