Lymphocytic Choriomeningitis Virus (LCMV)

Key information about LCMV:
- LCMV is an arenavirus that infects wild rodents, primarily the house mouse.
- Rodents infected with LCVM may or may not show any signs of illness.
- Pet rodents (including mice, hamsters, and guinea pigs) can be infected with LCMV by coming into contact with mice carrying the virus.
- Rare cases of LCMV in people have occurred through contact with infected pet hamsters. Most people exposed to LCMV either do not become sick or have very mild flu-like illness.

Public health concerns regarding LCMV:
- Human infection can occur through contact with the urine, droppings, saliva, or bedding materials of infected rodents.
- Infection in healthy people usually goes unnoticed or causes flu-like symptoms, including fever, decreased appetite, headache, muscle aches, nausea or vomiting.
- People with compromised immune systems are most at risk of becoming ill with LCMV.
- If infection occurs in a pregnant woman, LCMV can cause birth defects or mental retardation in the baby.
- LCVM is an occupational risk for those working with laboratory rodents.
- Pet rodents can carry other germs that can cause illness.

General recommendations for people who have pet rodents:
- Pet rodents can carry other pathogenic organisms such as Salmonella. Therefore, wash your hands with soap and water (or hand-sanitizer, if soap is unavailable) after handling pet rodents or items that may come in contact with pet rodents.
- Because of concerns about LCMV, if you are pregnant or have a weakened immune system, you are discouraged from having pet rodents in your home. If you do, you should keep the rodents in a separate room of the house and have someone else care for them.
- Keep wild rodents out of your home to minimize the risk of LCMV infecting your pet rodent.
- Provide a clean living environment for your pet rodent—supply fresh bedding, food, and water on a regular basis. Clean its cage outdoors or in a well-ventilated area.
- Consult your veterinarian if you have specific questions regarding your pet rodents’ health.

Additional Information:
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- CDC- Handling rodents

This fact sheet is meant to provide basic information. For specific health concerns please contact your physician or veterinarian. Updated 2005.