

# ***Southern Giant Pouched Rats: Risks and Exposure Control Practices***



**Species:** Southern Giant Pouched Rat (*Cricetomys ansorgei*); native to tropical regions of southern Africa, notably Zimbabwe, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

[The following information is based on what is known about the Gambian Pouched Rat (*Cricetomys gambianus*); native to Sub-Saharan Africa, ranging geographically from Senegal to Kenya and from Angola to Mozambique (although it is absent from much of the Democratic Republic of Congo). Less information is known about the species here at the University of Virginia.]

**Source:** Non-native, wild caught (Western Africa); quarantined at Cornell University; PCR tested and negative for orthopoxvirus (monkeypox).

**What are the general risks?** Wild-caught rodents pose a potential higher hazard to researchers and animal care staff, as the disease risks can be considered exotic or are not well-characterized. Substantially larger in size than normal laboratory rats, and not domesticated and thus less predictable, the capability of these animals to potentially cause serious injury from bites is increased. Known to be agile climbers and jumpers these behaviors can present challenges when handling.

**What zoonotic diseases do they carry?** Diseases linked to African pouched rats include Leptospirosis, Bartonellosis (*Grahamella knaiae* spread by fleas), Murine Typhus (*Rickettsia typhi*), Q-Fever (*Coxiella burnettii*), Trypanosomiasis (*T. brucei gambiense*), Potiskum virus (flavivirus family) and Monkeypox virus. Several of the bacterial diseases are spread by biting arthropods (fleas, flies and ticks), which the animals at UVA do not have.

## **Exposure Control Practices:**

- Frequently wash hands with soap and water, even after removing gloves
- Do not eat or drink, apply cosmetics, or touch face when in animal areas
- Wear protective gloves when handling animals
- Wear a disposable gown when handling animals to protect clothes from pathogens/allergens
- Wear eye/face protection if splash or spray is possible
- Sanitize animal work areas frequently using Cavicide® or MinnCare®

## **Training Points:**

- Prioritization of safe and secure handling techniques to avoid being bitten or scratched
- Awareness of potential for disease transmission and mindfulness of unexplained health symptoms
- New animal handlers should demonstrate proficiency in rodent handling and restraint techniques
- Do not attempt to discipline these animals for poor behavior: cage them and try again at another time

## **If injured:**

- Wash the area with soap and water
- Immediately report all exposures, injuries, bites, scratches, needlesticks, etc. to your supervisor
- Seek medical advice and treatment through UVA WorkMed (243-0075) for employees and paid students or UVA Student Health (924-5362) for un-paid students
- On weekends or holidays, report to the UVA Emergency Department and bring this sheet with you so medical staff can better understand the potential for zoonotic infection and effective treatment