

## Keep Rabbit Bowls Clean

**Keep your rabbit's food and water dishes clean to avoid illness.**

*By Ifsha Buttitta*

How clean are your rabbit's food and water dishes? It's a hard question to answer from simply looking at the dishes. To protect your bunny from illness due to contaminated food and water dishes, follow strict rules of sanitation.

First off, start with the proper types of bowls. Julie Musella, DVM, of The Cat Doctor in Santa Clarita, California, suggests using hard dishes that won't scratch. "I don't recommend plastic dishes," she said. "You are much safer with a hard dish that doesn't scratch, such as glass or stainless steel. That way, there aren't bacteria or fungus being harbored in any abrasions on the surface of the dish." Be sure glass dishes are not leaded, she added, and choose ceramic crocks made with food-safe, non-lead glazes. "Some ceramics can still be relatively porous, which can invite bacteria to grow in those spaces," Musella noted.

Thoroughly cleaning rabbits' dishes on a regular basis is also important. Roxanne Jones, of Roxanne's Rabbit Rescue, Inc., in Sarasota, Florida, recommends soaking bowls in hot water and cleaning them with dish detergent. Follow this with a complete rinse and dry. Don't rely on how clean a bowl simply looks, she said. "Water bowls may look clean but are often slimy," added Musella.

Cleanliness goes a long way to ensuring a bunny's good health. According to Musella, you might encounter staph bacteria as well as various coliforms, which can actually be in tap water to certain levels. "Coliforms typically are mammalian digestive tract bacteria like E. coli (the virulent form being the O157 one that is always on the news), Salmonella (though not as common), and other types of bacteria." She warns that these bacteria, especially Salmonella, definitely cause disease in rabbits. "The diseases can range from severe dysbiosis, as happens in rabbits with some oral antibiotics, to systemic sepsis, bacteria in the bloodstream infecting various organs."

To protect against these invaders, Musella recommends putting all pet food and water dishes through the hot cycle of the dishwasher at least a couple of times a week. Having an extra set of dishes on hand makes this task more convenient.

Another potential culprit lurking in a rabbit's bowls could be moldy pellets, Jones said. The best bet is to dump old pellets and replace them with fresh ones daily.