

## Rat Respiratory Infections

**Pet rats are susceptible to developing respiratory illnesses.**

*By Audrey Pavia*

Posted: March 31, 2008, 5 a.m. EDT

Respiratory issues in pet rats are fairly common, and must be treated immediately by a veterinarian.

Be on the lookout for excessive sneezing; loss of appetite; dull coat; and raspy, audible or labored breathing. If you see these signs, your rat likely has a respiratory infection.

The bacteria *Mycoplasma pulmonis* is usually responsible for respiratory infections in rats. It is highly contagious, and most rats carry the bacteria in their bodies. When a rat's immune system is compromised, the bacteria can become active and cause respiratory illness. Secondary bacterial infections can also occur as a result.

Rats are treated with antibiotics such as penicillin to help control the *pulmonis* bacteria and reduce any signs of respiratory illness. They may also be treated with other antibiotics to control secondary bacterial infections. Older rats suffering from severe infections may also need a bronchodilator to help them breathe, as well as diuretics and anti-inflammatory drugs.

You can help your rat stay healthy by providing good preventive care. Feed your rat a good diet, keep its cage clean and keep stress to a minimum. This allows your small pet's immune system to stay strong and fight off the bacteria.

Don't smoke around your rat since this can make it more susceptible to the bacteria. Quarantine new rats for at least two weeks to make sure they are healthy before introducing them to other rats.