



Reducing the risk of gastroenteritis at open farms, petting zoos and animal exhibits



How do infections spread from animals to humans?

Many animals carry germs in their bowels which have the potential to cause human disease, yet few animals show signs of illness. The animals and their environment may be contaminated with these germs. Germs may be taken in by mouth by putting the fingers to the mouth after touching animals, enclosures or equipment, or by eating, drinking or smoking with soiled hands. Most germs then take several days to multiply and cause symptoms of gastroenteritis such as diarrhoea, vomiting and abdominal pain.

Farms, zoos and exhibits where patrons may interact with animals provide enjoyable and educational encounters for children and adults. However, various infectious diseases may be spread from animals to humans. These diseases include gastroenteritis due to germs such as *Salmonella* or *Campylobacter*, or parasites such as *Cryptosporidium*, and rare but more serious conditions such as Haemolytic Uraemic Syndrome (HUS), due to strains of *E. coli* bacteria. Although encounters with animals rarely result in illness, care must be taken to reduce the spread of germs from animals to patrons.

Operators are responsible for providing patrons with information and facilities that minimise the risk of acquiring infections from animals. They must train staff to safely manage interactions of humans with animals.

How can the spread of infection be prevented?

Handwashing

Patrons must wash their hands ...

- After leaving an animal enclosure
- Before eating, drinking or smoking
- After removing footwear or soiled clothing

The operator must provide sufficient handwashing facilities on site with running water, soap and disposable towels. Suitable and adequate signs should be present to direct patrons to washing facilities if facilities are not immediately adjacent to the animal area. Hands should be washed thoroughly for at least fifteen to twenty seconds. Children must be supervised while washing their hands.

Options for mobile farms are:

- portable wash hand basins with running water, soap and paper towels,
OR if this is not possible
- 70% alcohol-based hand rubs (gels) or disposable moist hand wipes for each person leaving the animal enclosure. Facilities must be provided for the disposal of hand wipes or paper towels.



Persons or school groups visiting farms may wish to carry 70% alcohol-based hand rubs (gels) or disposable hand wipes with them as an additional precaution.

Separate eating and drinking

Food and drinks may be prepared, served and consumed only in designated areas, clearly separate from the animals. Eating, drinking or smoking must not occur in areas where the public can come into contact with animals. Raw milk must not be served to patrons.

Supervise children

Children must be closely supervised when amongst animals. Children should not put their fingers to mouths whilst in the animal enclosure or before washing their hands. Dummies and toys should not be permitted in animal enclosures. Dummies or toys that fall on the ground must be washed thoroughly before returning them to children.

Care for vulnerable groups

The effects of infections acquired from animals may be more severe for certain vulnerable persons. These include young children, pregnant women, elderly persons, and persons with impaired immune systems. Such persons, and their carers, should weigh the benefits of animal contact against the risk, and take particular care with hygiene.

For further information contact the Communicable Diseases Section, Department of Human Services:
Telephone (03) 9637 4126

Published by Victorian Government Department of Human Services
Melbourne Victoria

February 2003

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