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Public Health
England

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Pets and other animals in school can enhance the learning environment. However, contact with animals can pose a risk of infection including gastro-intestinal infection, fungal infections and parasites. Some people, such as pregnant women and those with a weakened immune system, are at greater risk of developing a severe infection. However, sensible measures can be taken to reduce the risk of infection to the children and to staff.

Only mature and toilet trained pets should be considered and the Head Teacher should ensure that a knowledgeable person is responsible for the animal. There should be a written agreement within the school detailing:

- the types of animals allowed in the school
- how to manage them and permitted behaviour whilst on the premises
- where they can go and where they cannot go when in the school
- any insurance liability of owners and handlers

Animals should always be supervised when in contact with the children and those handling animals advised to wash their hands immediately afterwards. Animals should have recommended treatments and immunisations, be regularly groomed (including claws trimmed) and checked for signs of infection. Bedding should be laundered regularly.

Cat litter trays should be cleaned daily wearing disposable gloves. It should not be placed near food preparation, storage or eating areas. Wash hands immediately after removing gloves but pregnant staff

members should not carry out this task because of the risk of toxoplasmosis.

Feeding areas should be kept clean and their food stored away from human food. Food not consumed in 20 minutes should be taken away or covered to prevent attracting pests¹.

Visits to petting farms and zoos

There are a number of diseases that can be passed on to pupils and staff from infected farm animals such as campylobacter, salmonella and cryptosporidium. It is not possible to know which animals are carriers so a standard approach to reducing the risk of transmission of infection to children and staff should be taken.

Before you go

Emphasise the importance of hand hygiene during and after the visit and check that the farm has easily accessible hand washing facilities. Educate pupils not to eat, drink or put fingers in their mouths except when in designated eating areas and after they have washed their hands.

Check that the farm is well managed. Drinking taps should be clearly marked and sited in a clean area away from the animals.

During the visit

If children are allowed to handle or feed the animals, ask them not to put their faces against the animals or put their hands in their own mouths afterwards. Check that children wash and dry their hands thoroughly after contact with animals and particularly before eating and drinking. Younger children should be supervised.

Food should only be taken in the designated picnic areas. Children should be reminded not to eat anything which may have fallen on the ground. They should not eat or drink unpasteurised products like milk, cheese or ice-cream, or taste animal feed stuff such as silage and concentrates.

Manure or slurry presents a particular risk of infection and children should be warned against touching it. If they do, ensure hands are promptly washed and dried.

At the end of the visit

Ask all the children to wash and dry their hands before leaving. Ensure that they are as free as possible from faecal material².

School trips

Some school trips involve activities associated with a small risk of picking up an infection, particularly those involving water-based activities and visits to farms or animal parks.

Water based activities

There is a risk of infection associated with any water-based activity on rivers, canals and freshwater docks,

and also with the collection of specimens from ditches, streams and ponds. Water-based activities should only be undertaken at education authority residential centres.

Exercises such as 'capsize drill' and 'rolling' should ideally be practised in swimming pools and never in stagnant or slow-moving natural bodies of water.

Children and staff should cover all cuts, scratches and abrasions with a waterproof dressing prior to the activity. Do not eat or drink immediately after water-based activities until after hands have been washed.

The use of appropriate footwear is recommended to reduce the risk of cuts to the feet. Pupils and staff should always wash or shower after canoeing or rowing.

Anyone taking part in water based activities who becomes ill within 3 to 4 weeks of the activity is advised to seek medical advice.

It should be made clear to parents and carers that if their child becomes ill following participation in outdoor or water-based activities, the treating doctor should be made aware of the child's participation in these activities.

Babies or children shouldn't swim in public swimming pools for 2 weeks after diarrhoea and vomiting has stopped³.

References

1. Health Protection Agency (2002) Guidelines for the control of Infection and Communicable Diseases in nurseries and other Institutional early years Settings in South West London Sector. (2003) South West London Health Protection Unit __
2. Health and Safety Executive (2015) [Preventing or controlling ill health from animal contact at visitor attractions](#) __
3. NHS Choices [Diarrhoea and vomiting in babies and children](#) __

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