

Infectious Diseases at Petting Zoos

Background

Infectious disease agents can cause illness in humans and may be carried by many types of animals including pets (dogs, cats, birds, reptiles and exotic species), livestock (cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, chickens), and wildlife (bats, skunks, raccoons, rabbits). The primary infectious agents in a petting zoo setting include Salmonella, Campylobacter, E. coli O157:H7, Giardia and Cryptosporidium, which all may be passed in animal feces and transmitted to humans via direct or indirect fecal-oral contact. Animals with the infectious agents in their feces may or may not show signs of illness such as diarrhea. Direct fecal-oral transmission may occur when animals are petted or touched. Indirect fecal-oral transmission can occur if fecal contamination of foods, water or surfaces (fencing, ground) occurs.

Why Are Recommendations Needed?

Human illness outbreaks have been linked to visiting petting zoos or similar settings where animal contact occurs. It appears the number of petting zoos is increasing. This increases the risk of human illness as more people visit these facilities and have contact with contaminated animals. Children are particularly at risk if preventive measures are not followed.

Provide Information to Your Visitors

Post signs in several locations including the beginning of the tour, places where the animals are located, and the eating area. Be sure to list animals that are off limits and should not be touched. Include the following messages:

- Wash hands with soap and water after touching the animals.
- Wash hands with soap and water before eating.
- Avoid touching your face or mouth until your hands are washed just before exiting.
- Do not take food or beverages into animal areas.
- Children should not be allowed to use pacifiers, baby bottles and spill-proof cups, sometimes called “sippy” cups.
- Likewise, they should not carry toys into animal areas.
- Do not take strollers into petting areas.

Point out the signs to the visitors and go over each point, emphasizing hand washing, before starting the tour.

Hand Washing

Provide sufficient hand washing stations with running water, soap, and disposable towels in convenient locations. Route visitors directly to the hand

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washing stations after leaving an animal area, and before entering the eating area.

- Hand washing facilities should be convenient for use by children and adults.
- Maintain hand washing stations in a sanitary condition and keep soap and towel dispensers stocked.
- Encourage employees/staff to use the hand washing facilities and demonstrate to visitors how to wash hands properly.
- Do not take food or beverages into animal areas.

Cleaning and Disinfection

- Remove and dispose of animal manure frequently throughout the day.
- Replace animal bedding daily.
- Clean visible fecal material from any surface with soap and water as soon as possible.
- Clean fencing and rails daily with soap and water or more frequently as needed.
- Disinfect fencing and rails after cleaning (with 1 part bleach/10 parts water solution or Lysol following container directions).

Animals

- Calves, other young ruminants (including sheep and goats), and young poultry present a greater risk of transmitting infections to humans than other animals.
- Do not display ill animals or those known to be positive for infectious agents.
- Prevent contact with manure, water troughs and animals that should not be touched by providing barriers and controlling access to areas where visitors should not go.

Adult Supervision

- Groups of visitors to your facility should include responsible adults. If adult supervision is not apparent, be prepared to provide it with your own staff.

Eating

- Locate eating areas away from animal areas.
- Exclude all animals from eating areas.
- Keep eating areas clean.
- Provide only an approved water source for drinking water.

If you provide or prepare food items for visitors, contact your local health department for information about safe food preparation and handling.

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