

Preventing or controlling ill health from animal contact at visitor attractions

Summary of control measures



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This is only a summary document. More detailed information including photographs and case studies of good practice can be found in the full Industry Code of Practice.

It should be assumed that animals at visitor attractions carry a range of micro-organisms, some of which can be transmitted to humans. Diseases passed from animals to humans are known as zoonoses. Some zoonotic diseases are more serious than others. There are a range of zoonotic diseases that could be acquired from animal contact at visitor attractions including: verocytotoxigenic *Escherichia coli* or VTEC one of which is *E. coli* O157 and *Cryptosporidium parvum*. Therefore, as with many other activities, visits to such premises can never be considered free from all risk. However, implementing the control measures in this guidance will help ensure that the risk of infection from contact with animals is low.

Background

All animals naturally carry a range of micro-organisms, some of which can be transmitted to humans, in whom they may cause ill health, which in some cases may be severe or life threatening.

- People can become infected by micro-organisms such *E. coli* O157 or *Cryptosporidium parvum* through consuming contaminated food or drink, through direct contact with contaminated animals, or by contact with an environment contaminated with animal faeces.
- Very low numbers of micro-organisms can cause human infection and so it is important that those responsible for the premises control the risks to visitors.

Controlling the risks from *E. coli* O157 and *Cryptosporidium parvum* will also control the risks from most other organisms, which are transmissible to humans by the hand to mouth route.

Assessing the risk

When undertaking your assessment you should:

- Assume that all animals (including birds) carry micro-organisms such as *E. coli* O157 that could represent a hazard to human health. Animals carrying infection can still appear healthy.
- Remember that ruminants (e.g. cattle, sheep, and goats) carry *E. coli* O157.
- Take into account that *E. coli* O157 is also found in a range of other animals and birds.
- Recognise that, although tests are available to detect the presence of *E. coli* O157 and other micro-organisms, a negative test result does not guarantee the animal is free of infection.
- Acknowledge that *E. coli* O157 may be introduced to your premises at any time by new stock, wild birds and animals, or by visitors.
- Bear in mind when selecting animals for petting areas that young stock, stock under stress, pregnant stock or stock unfamiliar with people etc. are more likely to excrete micro-organisms such as *E. coli* O157.
- Accept that other animals on the premises, including pets, may acquire the bacterium through contact with faeces etc.

Exposure to micro-organisms

Infection can occur when people come into contact with animal faeces or saliva by:

- Touching or kissing animals in petting areas or during bottle-feeding.
- Feeding, stroking or touching animals through gates or pens.
- Touching gates, or animal pen divisions, or other structures contaminated with faeces.
- Picking up contaminated feed from the floor.
- Removing contaminated footwear or clothing.
- Eating, drinking and smoking with contaminated hands.
- Using contaminated play equipment.
- Touching personal items taken on to the premises that have become contaminated e.g. dropped toys or dummies and pushchair wheels.
- Being bitten.

Just because something (an animal or an object) is not visibly contaminated with faeces, this does not necessarily mean it is free from risk.

CONTROLLING THE RISK

Premises layout and routes

You should:

- Decide which areas you want visitors to have access to.
- Make sure that routes around the premises prevent visitors from entering non-access areas, e.g. places where work is going on, or where manure is stored etc.
- Consider how you will prevent entry to non-access areas, e.g. by providing suitable fencing and warning signs.
- Direct visitors to washing facilities as they leave any animal contact area, before they access eating and play areas and before leaving the premises.
- Avoid directing visitors across tracks or routes regularly used by stock and farm vehicles. If this is not possible make sure visitors do not have to walk through any build up of faeces, liquid effluent, or soiled bedding material. For example, regularly clear or clean routes used by livestock or when cleaning out pens etc, and provide duckboards or similar so that visitors avoid contaminating their footwear.
- Keep the premises as clean as practicable and ensure areas to which visitors have access are free from any build-up of faeces.

Take the following precautions if you intend to use fields that have been used for grazing or keeping stock for recreational activities e.g. picnicking, camping, play areas:

- Keep farm animals off the fields for at least three weeks prior to use.
- Remove any visible droppings, ideally at the beginning of the period.
- Mow the grass, keep it short and remove the clippings before the fields are used for recreation.
- Keep farm animals off fields during use.
- Always wash hands before eating, drinking and smoking.
- Ensure adequate supervision of children, particularly those aged under five.

Animal contact

You should:

- Decide on suitable contact areas where visitors will be able to pet or feed animals.
- Decide which animals are suitable for contact areas. Sick or injured animals should be excluded from public contact.
- Not allow the public to enter pens where animals are housed. (This is because faeces or contaminated bedding will be underfoot and visitors may themselves carry infections on their footwear that could put your animals at risk.)

Visitors can be allowed to enter pens or enclosures specifically designed for the handling of animals, such as pens which lambs are brought into for feeding. These should be closely supervised and be near to washing facilities. Staff should remind visitors to wash their hands after animal contact, e.g. feeding the lambs. The staff should also remove faecal contamination from the pen as soon as possible.

- Ensure adequate and suitable washing facilities are available and are used by visitors when leaving contact areas.
- Ensure fencing and other barriers are regularly inspected and properly maintained.
- Ensure that animal contact areas where visitors stand or walk are as free as possible from any faeces, and put in place measures to prevent contamination from liquid manure or surface run-off where necessary.
- Regularly clean and disinfect pen divisions and gates as required in animal contact areas where visitors are able to touch them. A variety of cleaning methods are available. Not all disinfectants are suitable so take advice from your vet.
- Not allow faeces to remain on and contaminate walkways or other areas used by the visitors.
- Not allow contaminated bedding or run-off material to contaminate walkways or other areas used by visitors. Solid boarding at the base of pens can be used to prevent spillage onto walkways.
- Ensure that eating (including sweets, gum and ice cream), drinking, putting contaminated items in mouths (including dummies, pens and pencils) are discouraged and smoking is prohibited in animal contact areas. Signs should be displayed to instruct visitors of this requirement.
- Ensure an adequate number of trained staff for contact areas.
- Where eating and play areas are adjacent to areas containing animals, ensure that measures are provided to prevent members of the public touching the animals, e.g. by providing double fencing. This should be positioned at a distance that will prevent visitors reaching through to touch the animals and to prevent animals reaching over or through the fence to contact people.

In some non-contact areas, it will not be reasonably practicable to provide double fencing along enclosures where animals are kept. Examples include: livestock farms that open occasionally such as on 'Open Farm Sunday' or along a farm walk/trail through fields. In such cases the areas should be clearly signed to inform visitors they are entering a non-contact area and touching, petting and feeding of animals is not allowed. Eating and play areas should be located within non-contact areas. Any decision to rely on single fencing and signage rather than double fencing must be justified in your risk assessment.

Eating areas

You should:

- Site eating or picnic facilities away from areas where animals can be contacted, or where wind-blown, contaminated material (e.g. straw from muck heaps) might be present, and preferably at the end of any farm trail, walk or tour, or outside the main areas of the premises.
- Ensure that visitors have to pass through or by washing facilities before entering eating areas.
- Ensure visitors are advised, e.g. by adequate signage to wash their hands before eating.

- Exclude your animals, including captive birds, from eating areas. They could contaminate eating areas with faeces. Consider wing clipping, double gates into eating areas and adequate fencing to exclude them.
- Where eating areas are adjacent to animal contact areas, prevent animal contact e.g. by providing double fencing. This should be positioned at a distance that will prevent visitors reaching through to touch the animals and to prevent animals reaching over or through the fence to contact people.
- Provide adequate waste bins and clear discarded food from eating areas to discourage wild birds and rodents from feeding and contaminating the area.
- Locate ice-cream and sweet kiosks etc. in the non-contact areas of the premises, such as the eating areas or at the exit where visitors have passed washing facilities. Remind visitors using the kiosks, by notices or verbally, to wash their hands before touching or eating purchased food or sweets.

Play areas

You should:

- Site play areas away from areas where animals can be contacted, and preferably at the end of any farm trail, walk or tour, or outside the main areas of the premises.
- Ensure that visitors are advised e.g. by adequate signage, to wash their hands before and after using play areas.
- Exclude your animals including captive birds from play areas. They could contaminate play areas and equipment with faeces. Consider wing clipping, double gates into play areas and adequate fencing to exclude them.
- Where play areas are adjacent to animal contact areas, prevent animal contact e.g. by providing double fencing. This should be positioned at a distance that will prevent visitors reaching through to touch the animals and to prevent animals reaching over or through the fence to contact people.
- Ensure that play areas and equipment are designed so they can be cleaned on a regular basis to remove any contamination.

Washing facilities

While the primary control measures should focus on reducing and eliminating faecal contamination, the most effective method of removing dirt and contamination remains hand washing with soap and running hot and cold, or warm water followed by hand drying. Soap bars can easily be dropped onto the floor. Liquid soap is a better solution.

Washing facilities should be provided at or near the exits from any area/premises where visitors are encouraged to have animal contact.

Cleansing wipes or anti bacterial gels are not an acceptable substitute for proper hand washing.

Signage or other means of public communication should state this.

At temporary events, such as agricultural shows where suitable permanent washing facilities are provided (e.g. a purpose built toilet and washing block), it is acceptable practice for animal exhibitors or others to provide information and signs to indicate that visitors should use these facilities after contact with the animals. If such general visitor washing facilities do not exist or are not situated close by, then it will be necessary to provide suitable temporary washing facilities. Washing facilities should be positioned close to areas where animal contact is allowed.

The provision of adequate numbers of washing facilities and their location is crucial to preventing ill health. Facilities can be individual taps and basins, and/or long sinks with a number of running water outlets. They need to be provided and easily accessible at or near:

- Areas where visitor contact with animals is allowed, such as petting barns etc. If there is a one-way system for visitors through the contact area they should be provided immediately adjacent to the exit. If there is a two-way flow of visitors they should be provided immediately adjacent to entrances and exits. A one-way system may help to ensure that washing facilities are properly used.
- Entrances to eating areas.
- Exits from the premises.

All washing facilities should be/have:

- Accessible by all visitors, i.e. at the right heights for both children and adults or with raised standing areas provided for children. Check these do not create tripping or falling hazards.
- Running hot and cold, or warm water (e.g. mixer taps). It is easier to create soap lather with warm water, and it may encourage visitors, especially children, to wash more thoroughly particularly in cold weather. Warm water supplies should be fitted with a means of restricting the temperature to no more than 43°C to avoid scalding.
- Liquid soap. Bactericidal soaps are not necessary.
- Paper towels in and near animal contact areas. Elsewhere hot-air hand-dryers are suitable but may lead to queues that discourage visitors from washing their hands. Reusable hand towels are not suitable.
- Properly maintained and cleaned regularly as required, at least daily.
- Replenished with paper towels and soap as necessary.
- Open or pedal operated waste bins that are emptied as necessary.
- Arranged so that visitor throughput and/or water overflows etc. do not make the immediate vicinity muddy and so put people off using the washing facilities.

In exceptional circumstances, such as premises that open on an occasional basis in the summer, it may be acceptable to provide cold running water only, soap and disposable towels. This must be justified in your risk assessment.

Do not provide buckets or troughs of standing water that are shared or reused by several people. They do not allow effective hand washing, and reusing water can spread micro-organisms among those using it. Adding a disinfectant to the water does not make the practice acceptable.

Cleaning footwear, pushchairs, wheel chairs etc

The layout of the premises should be planned to minimise the likelihood of contamination of footwear, pushchairs, wheel chairs etc. Where this unavoidably occurs, you will need to consider providing suitable facilities to allow visitors to clean contaminated footwear and wheels on pushchairs and wheelchairs. The facilities should be arranged to reduce the risk of personal contamination from manure, liquid run-off etc. during the cleaning process and be located so that people can easily wash their hands after this has been done.

Visitor information and signage

Information should be provided to visitors covering the:

- Risks to health.
- Precautions taken to minimise risks.
- Personal responsibilities of visitors to minimise risks, including complying with hygiene precautions and carrying out hand washing.
- Site plan, map, route directions or other information as necessary

Training and supervision

You should:

- Ensure staff are trained and instructed about the human health risks associated with animals and the necessary control measures. Don't forget that training should also be provided for temporary or seasonal staff.
- Ensure staff are trained and instructed on what visitors should or should not do.
- Provide guidance to staff on how to explain the hygiene message to visitors, including the importance of thorough hand washing, particularly for children.
- Arrange adequate and appropriate levels of supervision in contact areas. The number of supervisors will depend on the size of the animal contact area and the number of visitors permitted or expected in that area at one time.
- Ensure that children are supervised while they wash their hands. Although this is the responsibility of parents or teachers, in some cases staff may need to help in supervision.
- Remind supervisors in animal contact areas (who may also be there to protect the animals) to ensure that visitors do not eat, drink or put items in their mouths while in these areas and until they have washed their hands on leaving the contact area.
- Ensure supervisors discourage visitors (especially children) from putting their fingers in their mouths, or kissing the animals.
- Stress to your own staff the importance of setting a good example and following good personal hygiene, e.g. thoroughly washing their own hands when necessary, and not eating or drinking in animal contact areas.

Livestock management procedures

You should:

- Consider producing an animal or farm health plan in consultation with your vet to help reduce the risks from zoonoses.
- Assess whether animals are healthy before moving them to animal contact areas, but remember that animals carrying VTEC do not necessarily show signs of illness.
- Ensure that animals that have just given birth, or been born, are not put in contact areas.
- Immediately remove any animals showing signs of ill health (such as diarrhoea) or stress from animal contact areas until they have recovered and seek veterinary attention and advice promptly.
- Keep animals and their housing clean.

- Consider whether replacement stock can come from within the premises rather than being brought in (this would reduce the likelihood of new infections being inadvertently brought on to the premises).
- Where possible, source replacement livestock (especially young animals for bottle feeding) from a reputable supplier with known health status where the stock-keeper will have ensured that they have received an adequate supply of colostrum after being born.
- Try to minimise movement and mixing of animals from different groups. This is particularly important to minimise the shedding of VTEC by ruminants such as cattle, sheep and goats.
- Regularly check all animals on display for evidence of illness, consulting your vet as appropriate.
- Regularly empty and clean water troughs and provide the animals with clean drinking water.

Manure and compost heaps

You should:

- Position manure or compost heaps well away from areas that visitors can access, or fence them off.
- Prevent or contain any liquid run-off where this might contaminate visitor areas or routes.
- Prevent dried contaminated material (e.g. bedding) being blown onto clean non-contact areas.
- Not allow visitors to collect and bag their own compost or manure.

Download the full Code of Practice Report.

