

Animals in Schools and Daycare Settings

From Centers for Disease Control

<http://www.cdc.gov/features/animalsinschools/>

Animals can be effective and valuable teaching aids for children, but there is a risk of illness and injury from contact with animals. Young children are especially at risk for illness because their immune systems are still developing and because they are more likely than others to put their fingers or other items into their mouths, a behavior that can spread germs. Also, infectious disease outbreaks have been caused by contaminated animal products used for educational activities in schools, such as owl pellets for dissection. Many adults and children have become very ill from infections they caught while visiting animal exhibits or farms during field trips or from animals kept in classrooms. When people forget to wash their hands right after touching an animal or its habitat, or bring food or drinks into areas where animals live or roam, they increase their risk for becoming ill.

To learn more about infectious diseases that are associated with animals and to help reduce the risks of getting sick or hurt from them, read the questions and answers below.

What types of diseases can animals spread? Can they cause injuries?

In the United States, the biggest risk of human illnesses from animals, especially to young children, is getting infected with germs like Salmonella, E. coli, and others that cause vomiting, diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramping. Animals can also carry germs that cause other kinds of diseases, such as rabies. Animals may have germs on their bodies and in their droppings, even when they appear clean and healthy. The germs can also get on cages, bedding, and wherever animals roam or walk around, and can contaminate these areas.

Injuries caused by animals in public settings include bites, kicks, scratches, and others. Most injuries from animals can be prevented if schools and daycare classrooms follow proper safety precautions.

How can I reduce the risk of illness from touching or being around animals?

After you touch an animal, or anything in the areas where they live and roam, wash your hands right away to help prevent illness. Read the following tips to learn more about hand washing:

- Always wash hands right after handling animals, their food, and/or their habitats (for example, cages, water bowls, toys). Also, everyone should wash their hands after going to the toilet, before eating and drinking, before preparing food or drinks, and after removing soiled clothes or shoes.
- Adults should always supervise hand washing for young children.
- Running water and soap are best. Use hand sanitizers if running water and soap are not available. Be sure to wash your hands with soap and water as soon as a sink is available.

What else can I do to help prevent illness or injury when animals are in schools or daycare classrooms, or during a school trip to an animal exhibit?

- Never allow young children to put their hands or objects (for example, pacifiers) in their mouth while interacting with animals.
- Adults should supervise human-animal contact, particularly involving children younger than 5 years of age.

- Children, teachers and other staff should be instructed to wash hands after contact with animals, animal products or feed, or animal environments.
- Display animals in enclosed cages or under appropriate restraints.
- Animal caretakers should not allow animals to roam, fly free, or have contact with wild animals.
- Designate specific areas for interaction with animals.
- Do not allow human food in animal contact areas; do not allow animals in areas where human food and drink are prepared, served, or consumed.
- Clean and disinfect all areas where animals have been present. Children should perform this task only under adult supervision.
- Do not clean animal cages or enclosures in sinks or other areas used to prepare food and drinks.
- Do not dissect owl pellets, frogs or other animals in areas where human food is prepared, served, or consumed. Thoroughly clean and disinfect surfaces that are used for dissection.
- Parents should be informed of the benefits and potential risks associated with animals in school classrooms. Consult with parents to determine special considerations needed for children who are immunocompromised, have allergies, or have asthma.
- Certain animals should not be allowed in schools and day cares with children younger than 5 years of age including reptiles (e.g., turtles, snakes, and lizards, amphibians (e.g., frogs, toads, salamanders, and newts), live poultry (e.g., chicks, ducklings, and goslings) and ferrets.

Other Animals Not Recommended in School or Child-Care Settings include:

- Inherently dangerous animals (e.g., lions, tigers, cougars, and bears).
- Nonhuman primates (e.g., monkeys and apes).
- Mammals at high risk for transmitting rabies (e.g., bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes, and coyotes).
- Aggressive or unpredictable wild or domestic animals.
- Stray animals with unknown health and vaccination history.
- Venomous or toxin-producing spiders, insects, reptiles, and amphibians.

What can I do to check that animals are healthy before I bring them into a school or daycare classroom?

It is important to remember that animals can have germs on their bodies and in their habitats, even if they appear healthy. However, if you decide to bring them into a school or daycare setting, make sure to follow these guidelines:

- Obtain appropriate veterinary care, a certificate of veterinary inspection, or proof of rabies vaccination (or all of these) according to local or state requirements.
- Animal caretakers should keep animals clean and free of intestinal parasites, fleas, ticks, mites, and lice.
- Ensure that personnel providing animals for educational purposes are knowledgeable regarding animal handling and zoonotic disease issues. Persons or facilities that display animals to the public should be licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.