

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

health

Farms, zoos and exhibits where patrons may interact with animals are enjoyable and educational 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*, parasites such as *Cryptosporidium*, and rare but more serious conditions such as haemolytic uraemic syndrome, caused by 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 giving patrons information and facilities to reduce the risk of infection from animals. They must train staff to safely manage interactions of humans with animals.

## How do infections spread from animals to humans?

Animals carry germs in their bowels which can cause human disease even if the animal does not seem sick. The animals and their environment may be contaminated with these germs. You can get these germs by putting your fingers to your 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.

## How can the spread of infection be prevented?

### Hand washing

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 hand washing facilities on site with running water, soap and disposable towels. They should display signs encouraging patrons to wash their hands and signs directing patrons to the hand washing facilities. 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 per cent alcohol-based hand rubs (gels) or alcohol-based wipes.

Provide facilities for disposing of hand wipes or paper towels.

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

## Separate eating and drinking

Eating, drinking or smoking should be in an area separate to animal contact areas. Provide and use separate areas for preparing and consuming food and drink.

*Do not serve raw milk to patrons.*

## Supervise children

Children must be closely supervised when with the animals. Children should not put their fingers to mouths while in the animal enclosure or before washing their hands. Dummies and toys should not be allowed in animal enclosures. Dummies or toys that fall on the ground must be washed thoroughly before they are returned to children.

## Care for vulnerable groups

The effects of infections acquired from animals may be more severe for vulnerable people. These include young children, pregnant women, older people, and people with impaired immune systems.

These people, and their carers, should weigh the benefits of animal contact against the risk, and take particular care with hygiene.

