

Petting Zoo and Open Farm Visits

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a healthcare professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

Visiting a petting zoo or open farm can be a fun and educational event; however, contact with animals needs to be done safely. Rarely, serious diseases can be spread from animals to people when simple precautions are not followed. People at most risk of serious illness include children, pregnant women, the elderly, and persons with weakened immune systems.

Which diseases are spread from animals to people?

Some of the most common germs that can be spread from animals to people are E. coli 0157 and other E. coli bacteria, Salmonella, Campylobacter, Giardia (Beaver Fever), Cryptosporidium and Yersinia.

What are the symptoms of diseases spread from animals to people?

Possible symptoms include diarrhea, bloody diarrhea, stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, fever, bloating, and gas. If you or your children experience any of these symptoms in the three weeks following a visit to a petting zoo or open farm, see your doctor or local community nurse right away.

How are diseases spread from animals to people?

Animals carry many types of germs in their intestines. These germs can spread from animals to people in the following ways:

- An animal's feces or manure can get onto its hair or fur, the bedding or the soil. The feces can contain germs that can make people sick when people touch an animal or the area around the animal, and do not wash their hands afterwards. Fecal matter can spread from hand to mouth through eating, sucking fingers, or putting toys that have been handled into the mouth.
- An animal's saliva or spit can also carry germs that can be spread when an animal bites, scratches or licks a person.
- When people milk cows, germs can get on their hands and can spread when they touch their mouth.
- Rarely, diseases including Q fever and toxoplasmosis can be spread when germs get into the air. This can occur when dust that contains infected animal waste, including birth fluids is stirred up. For this reason, the public should not be involved in the animal birthing process.

Young children are most at risk of infection because they are more likely to put their fingers in their mouths, ingesting dirt and bacteria from their hands.

Which animals spread diseases to people?

Animals in petting zoos and on open farms that can spread disease to people include cows, goats, sheep, horses, rabbits, pigs and poultry.

What you can do before you or your children visit a petting zoo or open farm.

Read this information and give it to the people who are supervising your children. Call ahead to the petting zoo or open farm for the following information. You may want to visit the site before bringing a large group of children.

- Are hand washing facilities available? Do they have running water, liquid soap and paper towels or hand sanitizer stations?
- Are there toilet facilities? Are they clean?
- Will there be on-site supervision?
- Is the eating area separate from the animal area?

Be prepared:

- Bring wipes and alcohol hand sanitizing gel with you. Use a hand sanitizer with 60 per cent to 95 per cent ethanol or isopropanol alcohol.
- If possible, eat before you go to the petting zoo or open farm, and not while you are there.
- Bring sturdy boots or shoes for the children to wear while in the petting zoo. This will help to prevent children from slipping and falling. At the end of the visit, children should change into a clean pair of shoes and then wash their hands to remove any dirt from their hands. Bag the dirty shoes and clean them at home.
- To keep your children safe and healthy, make sure there is an adequate number of adults to supervise your children.
- Do not bring toys into the animal areas.

Teach children how to wash their hands properly:

1. Wet hands well with running water, and lather with soap.
2. Rub hands together briskly for at least *20 seconds*, or the time it takes to sing Happy Birthday twice. Do not forget the palms, backs of hands, fingers, fingertips and nails.
3. Rinse hands well under running water.
4. Dry hands completely with paper towels. Do not dry hands on clothes.
5. Turn off the taps with paper towel.

[Alcohol based hand sanitizer is a good alternative to soap and water when the hands are not visibly dirty, but children have to be watched closely that the sanitizer is completely dry before children put their hands to their mouths. The alcohol in the hand sanitizer can be poisonous to a child.

What you can do to decrease the risk of disease at the petting zoo or open farm.

When you and your children are in the animal areas:

- Do not eat, drink, chew gum or smoke.
- Do not let children lick or suck their fingers or bite their nails.
- Do not let children touch their faces or mouths.
- Do not give children bottles, pacifiers or soothers.
- Do not let children pick up things off the ground.
- Do not let children kiss the animals.
- Do not let children eat the animals' food.
- Do not let children eat edible containers used to hold animal feed, such as ice cream cones.
- Do not share human food with animals.

When you and your children are in the eating areas:

- If animals such as dogs, cats or ducks are in the eating area, do not pet them. If you touch an animal, wash your hands afterwards.
- Eat in designated eating areas that are away from animals and their areas.
- Wash your hands before eating.

Wash your hands and your children's hands:

- After touching or feeding an animal
- After touching an animal's cage
- After touching the ground or falling
- Right after leaving animal areas
- Before eating or drinking
- After cleaning and/or removing boots or shoes

Supervise children and make sure they wash their hands *properly*.

If you or your children are injured:

- Be aware of injuries. Wash and bandage bites, cuts or scrapes.
- Report injuries to the operator of the petting zoo or open farm.
- Seek medical attention if the injury is serious or a wound gets infected.

Contact Information

For more information contact Yukon Communicable Disease Control at 667-8323. #4 Hospital Road, Whitehorse, Yukon

In the communities call toll-free 1-800-661-0408 extension 8323.

Adapted from BC HealthFiles