

Ensure that children wash hands thoroughly after handling any animal or being in an animal's environment. Providers need to remember to wash their own hands as well after handling or caring for the animal.

For more information see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website. This website has more information on health risks associated with different animals.

The site is:

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/>

You can get additional information on any of the illnesses or conditions listed in this brochure from the CDC website or by calling the Snohomish Health District Communicable Disease Outreach program and speaking to an environmental health specialist at **425.339.5278**. Staff can also help you to develop pet policies for resident or visiting animals.



The Communicable Disease Outreach Program offers consultations and STARS approved training to all child care providers. We encourage child care providers to take advantage of our services to improve the health and safety of children in their care.

A model pet policy for your child care can be downloaded off of the Snohomish Health District's website.

<http://www.snohd.org/>

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HEALTHIER SNOHOMISH COUNTY

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Animal safety and health  
information  
for child care providers



**SNOHOMISH**  
HEALTH DISTRICT  
[WWW.SNOHD.ORG](http://WWW.SNOHD.ORG)

## Preventing Diseases

Pets can have a very positive effect on children. In child care programs, pets can teach even very young children about values such as kindness, responsibility, and caring. These loving animals can also help children learn to give love and respect in return. Pets, by their non-judgmental acceptance and affection, increase socialization and self-esteem of children, especially those who may be shy or withdrawn.

Unfortunately, some pets can be a significant source of disease, allergies, and injury in young children. Parents should always be notified when pets are present. These practices should be followed even if an animal appears healthy, because even clinically healthy animals can transmit disease.

At least 30 diseases can be transmitted to humans from pets. Often the diseases are transmitted from the feces of the pets to the hands, and ultimately the mouths of children.

- Your pet or animal, indoors or out, should be in good health. Dogs and cats should be immunized and maintained on a flea, tick, and worm control program.
- Children and adults need to wash their hands after handling animals, animal waste, or cleaning cages. A thorough handwashing with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds is essential in preventing the spread of diseases.
- Animals should have a space outside of the children's play area to relieve themselves. Any animal waste in child areas should be removed immediately and disposed of properly. Animal litter boxes should not be located in areas accessible to children. Make sure the children's sandbox is covered when not in use so neighborhood cats won't use it.
- Animal cages should have removable bottoms for ease of cleaning, and should be kept clean.

## Preventing Diseases (Continued)

- Live animals and birds should not be in areas used for food preparation, food storage, or eating. In addition, animal food supplies should be kept out of reach of children.
- Toxoplasmosis can be transmitted from feces to humans. This can be especially dangerous for pregnant women. A woman can pass the infection to her fetus causing serious complications. If a pregnant woman is in a household with a cat, the litter should be changed daily by someone other than the pregnant woman. Cats should be fed only dry, canned, or cooked foods.
- Adults need to supervise any contact children have with agricultural animals such as pigs, goats, or chickens. Such animals can behave aggressively toward children. Children should wash their hands thoroughly after touching the animals.

## Animals to Avoid

Some pets are not appropriate for the child care setting because of the diseases they may carry.

- Turtles, iguanas, and other reptiles often carry the Salmonella bacteria, which causes severe gastrointestinal illness in humans. Hedgehogs may also carry this bacteria.
- Psittacine birds are those with hooked beaks including parrots, parakeets, cockatiels, and cockatoos. The Snohomish Health District discourages having these birds in a child care setting because they can pass an infection called psittacosis. The infection can cause severe pneumonia in humans.



## Animals to Avoid (Continued)

- Ferrets can behave aggressively toward very young children, inflicting severe bite wounds.
- Baby chicks or ducks may be contaminated with salmonella or campylobacter and should not be kept in child care environments.
- Wild animals of any kind including hedgehogs, raccoons, possums, and squirrels are not appropriate pets for child care.
- Bats pose a special problem. Bat houses are becoming increasingly popular, especially with gardeners because bats eat lots of insects. In Washington, however, a small number of bats carry the rabies virus. Since rabies is almost always fatal, children should be taught to never touch a live or dead bat. It is also inappropriate to encourage bat nests in the area of a child care home or center.

## Choose Pets Carefully

This will go a long way in establishing a happy, healthy environment. Consider the ages of the children as well as the temperament, personality, and general needs of the animal. There are many organizations, animal trainers, and veterinarians who can help a caregiver select an appropriate pet for a child care setting.