

Guidelines for Minimizing Risks

If you choose to visit a petting zoo or allow animals at a school or child care, use the following precautions:

- Call or visit before you go to the facility with children. Ask about precautions they take to protect the health of visitors.
- Ensure animals are in good health and non-aggressive.
- Make sure there are adequate and properly stocked handwashing facilities and use them often.
- Teach children proper handwashing and instruct them not to put their hands or objects in their mouths.
- Have close supervision and increase caregiver to child ratios to help monitor handwashing and animal-child interactions.
- Go over the rules beforehand and instruct children to use caution around animals.
- Obtain written parental permission before going on a field trip or bringing animals to a school or child care. Inform parents of the risks at this time.
- Interact with animals after eating lunch or snacks rather than before.
- Do not allow food, drinks, toys, bottles, strollers, or pacifiers into animal exhibit areas.
- Prevent children's contact with manure, animal food, or the animal's water. Don't let children sit or play on the ground.
- Do not allow kissing of animals.
- Do not involve infants and toddlers in animal activities.
- Consider having children look at the animals and learn about their behaviors rather than touch the animals.

"Each year many young children across the country come in contact with farm animals at petting zoos, petting farms, and county fairs where they may be putting themselves at risk of getting a life threatening infection like E. coli O157:H7."

- Dr. Jeffrey Koplan,
Former Director, CDC



PUBLIC HEALTH
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HEALTHIER SNOHOMISH COUNTY

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Information and
Guidelines for Keeping
Children Healthy



**SNOHOMISH
COUNTY** 
HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Animals Can Spread Illness

While animal exhibits can provide children with great joy and excellent opportunities for learning, adult caregivers need to be aware of the risks associated with these types of activities.

Animals can carry various types of infectious germs, often while appearing healthy. Germs can be carried on the animal's hair, mouth, manure, drinking water, or enclosure. Germs can then be spread to visitors through contact with the animal or its surroundings.

Some common illnesses that can be spread by animals include:

- E. coli O157:H7
- Salmonella
- Campylobacter
- Giardia
- Cryptosporidium
- Psittacosis

Children are at a higher risk of serious illness caused by these pathogens than healthy adults. They are also more likely to put their hands in their mouths or not wash hands thoroughly before eating or drinking. **At petting zoos, it is recommended that children in under the age of five not have direct contact with animals.**



Petting Zoos

There are currently no federal, state, or local laws for protecting the health of visitors at petting zoos.

To help protect the children, adults should visit the petting zoo first. It is best if children have one on one supervision during any animal interactions.



Make sure the petting zoo facility has taken the following precautions:

- separation between eating and animal areas;
- handwashing stations that are accessible with reminders posted;
- sanitizer gel available at frequent intervals between handwashing stations (this does not replace handwashing); and
- animal areas that are clean, free of waste, and have fresh bedding.

Animals Visiting a Child Environment

Some schools, child cares or other child programs choose to bring animals to visit children. Wild animals, reptiles, hybrid animals, baby chicks and ducklings, and exotic animals are not appropriate. Any animal brought to a child environment needs to be in good health and child-friendly. Only bring animals into areas that can be easily cleaned once the animal leaves. Animals must never be allowed into kitchens, food preparation areas, or infant/toddler areas.



Handwashing Facilities

Adequate handwashing facilities are critical to preventing illness. Make sure that handwashing stations are located nearby and stocked with liquid soap and paper towels.

Take frequent handwashing breaks. In the event that no soap or running water is available, use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol — but be sure to wash at a sink at the first available opportunity.

Always closely supervise young children's handwashing. Wash hands after leaving an animal area even if you didn't touch the animals.

