

# Recommendations For Petting Zoos, Petting Farms, Animal Fairs, And Other Events And Exhibits Where Contact Between Animals And People Is Permitted

**(This information may also be useful for those who operate or live on farms.)**

## *PURPOSE*

To decrease human exposures to rabies and to other zoonotic diseases, particularly those spread through contact with the feces (manure) of animals.

## *INTRODUCTION*

Animals may carry parasites, bacteria and other potentially infectious organisms that can be transmitted to people. Diseases that can be transmitted from animals to people are called zoonotic diseases. Zoonotic diseases can be spread by direct contact with an infected animal or their feces, through insects that bite or live on animals, and from contact with organisms that live in the environment where an animal lives. Certain groups of people may be more susceptible to zoonotic diseases, including infants, children, pregnant women and those with a weakened immune system.

Diseases which can be transmitted from animals to people include the following:

- *Enteric Diseases*, or diseases predominantly of the digestive system, include illnesses caused by organisms such as salmonella, cryptosporidium, *E. coli* 0157:H7 and giardia. Enteric disease organisms primarily cause diarrheal illness in people but in some cases can infect the blood and cause a life-threatening condition. People can be exposed to these enteric organisms by eating food contaminated with the feces of an infected animal, and by petting an animal contaminated with feces or touching a contaminated object, and then touching one's mouth. Animals can carry these organisms but do not become ill.
- *Rabies* is a fatal, viral infection of wild animals, such as raccoons, skunks, bats and foxes. Rabies can be spread to domestic animals and to humans through contact with an infected animal's saliva, usually through a bite or scratch. In people, rabies virus causes an infection of the brain, which is always fatal in those who are infected and do not receive protective vaccinations after an exposure.
- *Cat-scratch disease* is a bacterial disease which usually causes fever and swollen glands and is usually transmitted to people by kittens. People with weakened immune systems can also develop skin lesions and other serious forms of illness with this infection.
- *Psittacosis* is a bacterial disease that can cause fever, chills, rash and pneumonia. This disease is primarily transmitted through inhaling dust from the contaminated droppings of infected birds. The elderly and those with a weakened immune system may develop more serious forms of this illness.

**To reduce the risk of infection for the public, the animal owner should adhere to the following recommendations:**

1. Close supervision must be provided when contact between animals and the public is permitted. According to the Animal Welfare Act of APHIS, USDA, "A responsible, knowledgeable, and readily identifiable employee or attendant must be present at all times during periods of public contact" (9CFR Ch. 1, section 2.131, 1-1-99 edition).
2. Handwashing facilities should be made readily available to the public, and persons who handle or touch animals should be encouraged through signs and brochures to wash their hands with soap and water after touching any animals. If no running water is available, the use of waterless hand cleansers should be considered.
3. All animals permitted to have contact with the public should be carefully observed daily for health problems. Sick animals or animals behaving strangely should be prevented from having contact with the public (isolated) and carefully observed, and a veterinarian should be notified.
4. Visitors should not be allowed to sample animal feed or to drink raw milk.
5. All animals permitted to have contact with the public should wear collars with identifying information (numbers, names, etc.). A logbook should be maintained listing each animal's collar identification, age, sex, species, rabies vaccination history and descriptive markings. Signs should be posted which encourage the reporting of animal aggression, biting and the identification of the biting animal. For example, "Because your safety is important to us, we encourage the immediate reporting of all biting or scratching incidents and signs of animal aggression."
6. Visitors with open wounds on their hands should not be allowed to pet animals or to allow animals to lick their hands.
7. Visitors should not allow animals to lick their faces.
8. Eating and drinking by visitors should not be allowed near areas where animals are kept, and facilities for eating and drinking should be placed away from any animals. Visitors who have touched animals or their environments should always wash their hands before eating, drinking or smoking.

**Specific recommendations for the prevention of rabies and when a bite occurs:**

1. As a general rule, contact should not be permitted between the following animals and the public:
  - a. domesticated mammals for which there are no USDA-approved rabies vaccines (goats, swine, llamas, alpacas, vicunas, camels, etc.)
  - b. any wild mammals, including deer
2. A barrier zone between these animals and the public should be erected to prevent contact.
3. If a person is bitten or otherwise exposed to the saliva of a wild animal or a domesticated animal for which there is no USDA-approved rabies vaccine, the animal may need to be euthanized and tested for rabies. Since the shedding period of rabies virus

in such animals is unknown, a quarantine period (e.g., of two weeks) is not appropriate in the event that a person is bitten or otherwise exposed to the animal's saliva.

4. As a general rule, only domesticated mammals with current rabies vaccinations and for which USDA-approved vaccines exist should be permitted to have contact with the public.

NOTE: Currently, USDA-approved vaccines exist for the following domesticated animals *only*: dogs, cats, ferrets, cattle, horses and sheep.

5. Domesticated animals for which there are no USDA-approved rabies vaccines (e.g. goats, swine, llamas) may be vaccinated for rabies to decrease their risks of contracting rabies. However, if a person is exposed to such an animal, the animal will not be considered vaccinated and may need to be euthanized and tested for rabies. Persons exposed to such animals should be informed that the animal is not considered vaccinated. While there has never been a documented case of rabies transmitted to a human from a goat, pig or llama, this possibility theoretically exists.

6. When a person is bitten or otherwise exposed to the saliva of a properly vaccinated, domesticated animal for which there is a USDA-approved vaccine, the animal should be isolated for a ten-day quarantine period if it is healthy. The Department of Food and Agriculture, Bureau of Animal Health (617-626-1794) should be notified immediately to investigate the incident and establish a quarantine. If during the quarantine the animal becomes sick or behaves strangely, a veterinarian should be notified immediately. If the signs are consistent with rabies, the animal should be euthanized and the head submitted to the State Laboratory Institute for rabies testing (617-983-6385).

**IMPORTANT Phone Numbers:**

<b>Name and Description</b>	<b>Telephone Number</b>
<b>MDPH Division of Epidemiology and Immunization</b> For questions and information regarding human exposures to animals, including human illness suspected to be of animal origin.	<b>617-983-6800</b>
<b>MDPH Virology Laboratory</b> For questions and information regarding rabies testing.	<b>617-983-6385</b>
<b>MDFW Division of Fisheries and Wildlife</b> For questions and information regarding the law and policies concerning wild animals.	<b>617-626-1591</b>
<b>MDFA Bureau of Animal Health</b> For questions and information regarding the law and policies concerning domesticated animals including quarantines and policies about rabies vaccinations.	<b>617-626-1794</b>