



## VISITING PETTING ZOOS, FAIRS, ANIMAL EXHIBITS AND FARMS

Visiting animal exhibits has many benefits for children and can be a wonderful way for them to learn about animals. Sometimes, though, animals can carry diseases which can be passed to people, often through touching an animal or by contact with their feces (droppings).

Caregivers should be extra cautious when children less than five years of age visit animal exhibits. Young children are at a higher risk for serious infections from animals than most people, for several reasons. Young children are curious and may touch surfaces contaminated with animal feces. Young children like to put their hands in their mouth and are less likely to wash their hands well.

Here are some ways to make your visit healthy and safe for children and adults:

1. Discuss arrangements with the facility, before the visit.
2. Make sure the facility meets an acceptable safety standard. For example:
  - Pathways and areas open to visitors should be free of animal droppings.
  - Visitors should not have contact with animals except in designated animal contact areas.
  - Visitors should be excluded from contact with animal feces, manure, compost heaps and soiled equipment. If someone accidentally touches animal wastes, that person should wash and dry their hands immediately.
  - Animal contact areas should be well supervised by trained staff.
  - Animals in contact areas should be healthy, kept clean and should have not recently given birth or just been born.
  - Washing facilities with soap, running water and disposable towels should be provided at the exits of animal contact areas, in eating areas and at the exit to farms when soiled footwear might be removed. Supervise children when they are washing their hands. (If soap and water are not available, hand sanitizers or disposable wipes are the next best thing is to use.)
  - Eating, picnic and kiosk facilities should be located away from animals.
3. Put away Infant pacifiers when going through animal areas. This will prevent pacifiers from falling on the ground. Do not let children put their faces against an animal.
4. Food or drink should not be allowed in animal areas. Children should eat only when they are well away from the animals, and after washing their hands. Do not let children drink unpasteurized milk.
5. Children should wear appropriate clothing, including closed-toed shoes or boots. It is a good idea to clean any footwear that is worn both at the day care and on the field trip.

Many children worldwide have become ill with E. coli O157:H7 infection after contact with animals. Children and adults should always wash their hands after touching pets, and animals at petting zoos, farms, fairs, and exhibits, and before eating.

*Adapted from:*

*Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Infectious Diseases, Healthy Pets Healthy People, 2005;*  
[http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/spotlight\\_an\\_exhbts.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/spotlight_an_exhbts.htm)

*Tips for preventing infections from pets and petting zoos, Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2003*  
<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/corpaffr/foodfacts/zoose.shtml>

**For more information, call Environmental Health, Calgary Health Region at 943-8095.**