

Petting zoo and open farm visits

Visiting a petting zoo or open farm can be a fun and educational event, but any contact with animals needs to be done safely. In rare cases, animals can spread serious diseases to people.

Which diseases are commonly spread from animals to people?

While disease is rare and usually mild, severe disease can occur. Some of the most common infections that can spread from animals to humans include:

- *E. coli*
- *Salmonella*
- *Campylobacter*
- *Giardia*
- *Cryptosporidium*
- *Yersinia*

Other less common diseases include Q fever, psittacosis, toxoplasmosis and worms.

What are the symptoms?

Possible symptoms include:

- Fever
- Diarrhea or bloody diarrhea
- Stomach cramps
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Bloating
- Gas

If you or your child experience any of these symptoms after visiting a petting zoo or open farm, see your health care provider right away.

Who is most at risk of becoming sick?

Young children, pregnant people, seniors and people with a weakened immune system are most at risk of becoming sick.

How are diseases spread from animals to people?

Animals carry many types of harmful germs even if they appear healthy. You can get sick if you come into contact with the bodily fluids or feces of an infected animal. Disease may spread when touching an infected animal,

or by coming into contact with their feces, urine, saliva or food.

Animal feces or manure can get onto its hair or fur, bedding or soil. The feces can contain germs that can make you sick. When you touch an animal or the area around the animal and do not wash your hands afterward, the germs can spread from hands to mouth. This can happen through eating, sucking fingers or when children put toys into their mouths.

An animal's saliva or spit can also carry germs that can spread if an animal bites, licks or scratches you. When you milk cows, feed animals or participate in other animal demonstrations, germs can get on your hands and infect you if you touch your mouth. Raw, unpasteurized milk or milk products from farm animals (cows, goats and sheep) can also carry harmful germs. These products can make you sick if you consume them.

When dust containing infected animal waste, such as birth fluids, gets stirred up into the air, germs can spread to people. For this reason, the public should not be involved in the animal birthing process.

Which animals spread diseases to people?

Animals such as cows, goats, sheep, horses, rabbits, pigs, poultry, rodents and reptiles in petting zoos and on open farms can spread disease to people. Young animals such as chicks, ducklings, calves and lambs are more likely to carry germs compared to older animals.

What can you do to reduce the risk of disease at the petting zoo or open farm?

Follow the simple precautions below to help reduce your risk of getting sick.

Wash your hands and your child's hands:

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

Supervise your child and make sure they wash their hands properly. For more information on hand washing,

see [HealthLinkBC File #85 Hand washing: Help stop the spread of germs.](#)

When you and your child are in the animal areas DO NOT:

- Eat, drink, chew gum or smoke
- Let your child lick or suck their fingers or bite their nails
- Let your child touch their face or mouth
- Give your child toys, a bottle, pacifier or soother
- Take strollers into the enclosure with the animals
- Let your child pick up things off the ground
- Let your child kiss or snuggle the animals
- Let your child eat the animals' food
- Share human food with animals

When you and your child are in the eating areas:

- Wash your hands before eating or drinking
- Eat in designated eating areas away from animals and their 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 afterward

If you or your child are injured:

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

What can you do before visiting a petting zoo or open farm?

Call ahead:

Call the petting zoo, open farm or public health unit to get more information on health and safety. Ask questions such as:

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

Be prepared:

- Bring wipes or alcohol-based hand sanitizing gel or foam with you to use in situations when you are not

near a hand-washing station. Use a hand sanitizer with 60 to 95 percent ethanol or isopropanol

- Alcohol-based hand rubs will not work if your hands are greasy or visibly dirty. If it's not possible to wash with soap and water, use towelettes to remove grease and dirt before using an alcohol-based hand rub
- If possible, eat before you go to the petting zoo or open farm and not while you are there
- Wear sturdy boots or shoes while at the petting zoo. This will help prevent you and your child from slipping and falling. At the end of the visit, change into a clean pair of shoes and then wash your hands. Put the dirty shoes in a bag and clean them at home
- Clean and disinfect strollers, especially the wheels, after visiting the petting zoo or open farm
- Make sure there are enough adults to supervise children

Teach your child how to wash their hands properly by following these steps:

1. Wash hands well with warm water and soap
2. Rub hands together briskly for at least 20 seconds or the time it takes to sing the ABC song. Do not forget the palms, backs of hands, fingers, fingertips and nails
3. Rinse hands well for 10 seconds under warm running water
4. Dry hands completely with paper towels. Do not dry hands on clothes
5. Turn off the taps using a paper towel

For more information

For more information, visit the following:

- [HealthLinkBC File #02 E. coli infection](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #10 Giardia infection](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #17 Salmonellosis](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #43 Toxoplasmosis](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #48 Cryptosporidium infection](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #58 Campylobacter infection](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #61a Role of pets in human disease](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #77 Yersiniosis](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #79 Q fever](#)



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