



Petting Zoo and Open Farm Visits

Visiting a petting zoo or open farm can be a fun and educational event. Any contact with animals needs to be made in a safe way. Although rare, sometimes serious diseases can be spread from animals to people. Simple precautions can reduce the risk of illness. People at most risk of serious illness include children, pregnant women, the elderly, and persons with weakened immune systems.

Which diseases are spread from animals to people?

Some of the most common germs that can be spread from animals to people are *E. coli* O157 and other *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, *Giardia*, *Cryptosporidium*, and *Yersinia*.

What are the symptoms?

Possible symptoms include fever, diarrhea, bloody diarrhea, stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, bloating, and gas. If you or your children experience any of these symptoms after visiting a petting zoo or open farm, see your doctor or health professional right away.

How are diseases spread from animals to people?

Animals carry many types of germs in their intestines. These germs can spread from animals to people in the following ways:

- An animal's feces or manure can get onto its hair or fur, the bedding, or the soil. The feces can contain germs that can make people sick. When people touch an animal or the area around the animal and do not wash their hands afterwards, the germs can be spread from hands to mouth. This can happen through eating, sucking fingers, or putting toys into their mouth.
- An animal's saliva or spit can also carry germs that can be spread when an animal bites, licks, or scratches a person.

- When people milk cows, feed animals or participate in other animal demonstrations, germs can get on their hands and spread when they touch their mouths.
- Rarely, diseases including [Q fever](#) and [toxoplasmosis](#) can be spread when germs get into the air. This can occur when dust that contains infected animal waste, such as birth fluids, is stirred up. 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 and poultry in petting zoos and on open farms can spread disease to people.

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

Wash your hands and your children'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/or removing boots or shoes
- After using the washroom

Supervise children and make sure they wash their hands properly. For more information, see HealthLink BC File [#85 Hand Washing for Parents and Kids](#).

When you and your children are in the animal areas:

- Do not eat, drink, chew gum, or smoke.
- Do not let children lick or suck their fingers or bite their nails.
- Do not let children touch their faces or mouths.
- Do not give children bottles, pacifiers or soothers.

- Do not let children pick up things off the ground.
- Do not let children kiss the animals.
- Do not let children eat the animals' food.
- Do not let children eat edible containers used to hold animal feed, such as ice cream cones.
- Do not share human food with animals.

When you and your children are in the eating areas:

- Wash your hands before eating.
- 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 afterwards.

What can you do before you or your children visit a petting zoo or open farm?

To prepare for your visit, read this information or give it to the people supervising your children.

Call ahead to the petting zoo, open farm, or public health unit for more information on health and safety.

- Are there hand washing facilities available? Do they have running water, liquid soap, and 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 hand sanitizing gel with you to use in situations when you are not near a hand-washing station. Use a hand sanitizer with 60 to 95 per cent ethanol or isopropanol alcohol.
- If possible, eat before you go to the petting zoo or open farm and not while you are there.
- Bring sturdy boots or shoes for the children to wear while in the petting zoo. This will help prevent children from slipping and falling. At the end of the visit, children should change into a clean pair of shoes and then wash their hands. Put the dirty shoes in a bag and clean them at home.

- Make sure there are enough adults to supervise children

Teach children how to wash their hands properly:

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 Happy Birthday twice. Do not forget the palms, backs of hands, fingers, fingertips and nails.
3. Rinse hands well under running water.
4. Dry hands completely with paper towels. Do not dry hands on clothes.
5. Turn off the taps using a paper towel.

If you or your children are injured:

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



BC Centre for Disease Control
AN AGENCY OF THE PROVINCIAL HEALTH SERVICES AUTHORITY

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm or your local public health unit.

Click on www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.