



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 in a safe way. In rare cases, serious diseases can be spread from animals to people. Take these simple precautions to help reduce your risk of getting sick.

Which diseases are commonly spread from animals to people?

Some of the most common diseases that can be spread from animals to people are *E. coli* infection, salmonellosis, campylobacteriosis, giardiasis, cryptosporidiosis, and yersiniosis.

Other, less common diseases include Q fever and toxoplasmosis.

What are the symptoms?

Possible symptoms include:

- fever;
- diarrhea, or 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 health care provider right away.

Who is most at risk of becoming sick?

Those at higher risk of serious illness include young children, pregnant women, the elderly, and those with weakened immune systems.

How are diseases spread from animals to people?

Animals carry many types of diseases in their intestines. You can get sick if you come into contact with the bodily fluids or feces of an infected animal.

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 you sick. When you touch an animal or the area around the animal and do not wash your hands afterwards, the germs can be 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 be 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 spread if you touch your mouth.

Additionally, when dust containing infected animal waste, such as birth fluids, gets stirred up into the air, germs can be 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 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; and
- after using the washroom.

Supervise children and make sure they wash their hands properly. For more information on hand washing, see [HealthLinkBC File #85 Hand Washing for Parents and Children](#).

When you and your children are in the animal areas do not:

- eat, drink, chew gum, or smoke;
- let children lick or suck their fingers or bite their nails;
- let children touch their faces or mouths;
- give children bottles, pacifiers or soothers;
- let children pick up things off the ground;
- let children kiss or snuggle the animals;

- let children eat the animals' food; and
- 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; and
- 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.

If you or your children are injured:

- wash and bandage bites, cuts or scrapes;
- seek medical attention if the injury is serious or if a wound gets infected; and
- 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, 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-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 per cent ethanol or isopropanol alcohol.
- Alcohol based hand rubs won't work if your hands are greasy or visibly dirty. If it's not possible to wash with soap and water, make sure to 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.
- 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 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, see the following:

- [HealthLinkBC Files #02 E. coli Infection](#)
- [HealthLinkBC Files #10 Giardia Infection](#)
- [HealthLinkBC Files #17 Salmonellosis](#)
- [HealthLinkBC Files #43 Toxoplasmosis](#)
- [HealthLinkBC Files #48 Cryptosporidium Infection](#)
- [HealthLinkBC Files #58 Campylobacter Infection](#)
- [HealthLinkBC Files #61a Role of Pets in Human Disease](#)
- [HealthLinkBC Files #77 Yersiniosis](#)
- [HealthLinkBC Files #79 Q Fever](#)

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles 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.

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