Safe Animal Contact in Educational Venues
A Guidance Document for NC State University

NC State University recognizes the positive benefits of human-animal contact. This document provides guidelines for minimizing disease and injury during educational venues supported by NC State University such as petting zoos, tours, exhibits, and photo opportunities. Although eliminating all risk to humans from animal contact might not be achievable, this document considers that the risks of these contacts can be minimized in a properly supervised and managed setting.

Animals that appear to be healthy might still be infectious and contaminate the environment. The risk for infections or outbreaks is increased by certain human factors and behaviors. These factors include inadequate hand washing, venues that attract substantial numbers of children, a lack of close supervision of children, and hand-to-mouth activities (e.g., use of pacifiers, thumb-sucking, smoking, and eating) in proximity to animals and a lack of awareness of the risk.

It is the responsibility of the operator to apply these principals to their unique setting:

- The proper permits have been acquired:
  - If the exhibit is at the State Fair, see http://www.ncagr.gov/oep/AnimalContactExhibit.htm regarding registration requirements.
  - For all other activities, ensure The Animal Care Regional Office of USDA, APHIS (919-855-7100) has been contacted at least 90 days in advance to submit licensing application materials and fees. For more information refer to http://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_welfare/content/printable_version/fs_anexhit.pdf
- The setting will be properly supervised and managed at all times. Children should be closely supervised during contact with animals to discourage contact with manure and soiled bedding. Hand-to-mouth contact (e.g., thumb-sucking) and strollers in the animal areas should also be discouraged. Reports of injuries and exposures should be reported.
- Only appropriately selected animals are used that receive regular health examinations and preventive care.
- Adequate hand-washing facilities are nearby. If appropriate, they are configured to be used by children.
- Adequate separation exists between animal exhibits and areas for eating and drinking.
- No food or beverages is allowed in animal areas. In addition, smoking, carrying toys, and use of pacifiers, spill-proof cups (“sippy cups”), and baby bottles should not be permitted in animal areas.
- Adequately maintained drinking water and restroom facilities are available.
- Manure and soiled animal bedding are collected promptly for proper disposal and not transported through non-animal areas. Tools are available for removal (e.g., shovels and pitchforks).
- The area may need to be cleaned and disinfected after the exhibit.
- Barriers are used as necessary to establish transition areas or restrict uncontrolled access to animals.
- Transition areas are clearly designated and posted for visitors to pass through when entering and exiting animal areas even if they need to be conceptual rather than physical. Post hand-washing reminders.
- Information is provided as appropriate regarding the 1) prevention of infection and injury and 2) location of hand-washing facilities and instructions for visitors to wash their hands upon exiting.
- Animal feed and water is not to be accessible to the public.
- If feeding animals is permitted, only food sold by the venue for that purpose should be allowed. Animal feed should not be eaten by humans and should not be provided in containers that can be eaten by humans (e.g., ice cream cones). This will reduce the risk for animal bites and the probability of children eating food that has come into contact with animals.
- Controls are in place to reduce the potential for injuries including bites, kicks, falls, scratches, stings, crushing of the hands or feet, and being pinned between the animal and a fixed object.
- Persons responsible for managing the venue are familiar with this document and will apply it to reduce injury and the transmission of germs that might occur when persons pet, touch or are licked by animals.
Health officials suggest these tips on how to enjoy petting zoos without getting sick:

- Don’t kiss the animals and limit your contact with them and the surroundings, such as fencing, stalls and gates, because manure may be present on their body and in their environment.

- Supervise young children and advise them to keep their hands out of their mouths.

- Don’t take food or drink into the animal area.

- Wash your hands as soon as you exit the animal area, and help young children wash their hands properly. Washing with soap and warm water is best. Use antibacterial towelettes or lotion only if handwashing facilities are not available and wash your hands as soon as possible.

- Clean your shoes when you return home and after doing so wash your hands.

- Call your doctor if you or your children get sick with stomach cramps, vomiting or diarrhea within a week of visiting a petting zoo. Tell the doctor you were around farm animals.
Please wash your hands after exiting the exhibit!