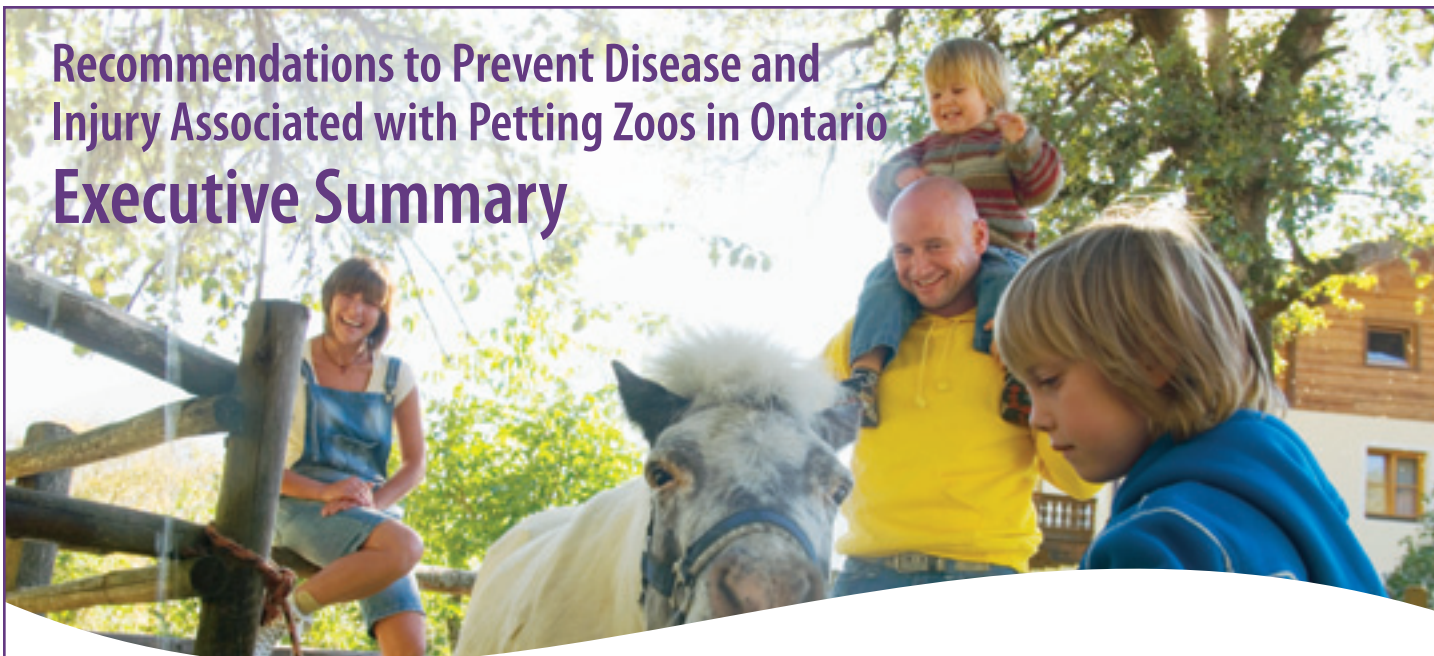


# Recommendations to Prevent Disease and Injury Associated with Petting Zoos in Ontario

## Executive Summary



### Introduction

As a petting zoo operator, you provide a fun place for children and adults to interact with animals. However, as you know, it's important to take certain precautions to make sure it's safe. Zoonotic infections – those that can be passed on from animals to human beings – present a small, but serious risk. All animals – including all domestic, wild and exotic animals – can possibly have zoonotic infections.

Animals have been linked with many human disease outbreaks in Canada and other countries. *Salmonella* and *E. coli* cause many of the large outbreaks resulting from contact with animals but many other diseases, such as rabies and ringworm, can also cause illness.

There are some easy steps you can take to ensure the safety of everyone – your guests, staff, animals and yourself.

### Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene is the single-most effective way to prevent zoonotic infections. The best way to ensure proper hand hygiene for your visitors is to provide either hand washing stations or alcohol-based hand sanitizers at the exit of your petting zoo. Have clear signs directing your customers to wash their hands with warm water and soap or use the alcohol-based hand sanitizers provided.

Each hand washing station should include warm running water, soap, paper towels and a garbage can. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers must have at least 60 per cent alcohol to be effective. Make sure to emphasize to the children that they shouldn't kiss the animals or wipe their hands on their clothes.

Be aware that your visitors often don't know that they can get sick from petting or being in contact with animals. Your staff should be at the exits to remind people to wash their hands.

It is important for hand hygiene stations to be easily usable by children and people with disabilities. Please make sure that the hand washing stations are cleaned regularly and supplies are always available.

Some groups of people are at a higher risk for catching a disease, such as pregnant women, the elderly, children under five years old, people who don't have strong immune systems and people who are mentally disabled. These people should be reminded to wash their hands thoroughly and frequently.

Also, children under five years of age should not come in contact with some animals such as reptiles, frogs and toads, birds or certain young animals such as calves, lambs or goat kids. They should also not be in contact with the immediate areas where these animals are kept or any surfaces these animals may have dirtied. These animals shed more disease-causing agents than other animals.

## Special Considerations – High Risk Groups

Certain people, as well as babies under one year old, don't have strong immune systems to fight off disease. They should not touch or feed any animals.

## Operation of the Zoo

Petting zoo operators should:

- Have trained staff available around the animals to watch the visitors and encourage appropriate contact with the animals, recognize and remove potential risks for visitors and be able to explain signs and handouts to visitors.
- Make sure visitors don't overcrowd at hand hygiene facilities or around the animals.
- Instruct caregivers and staff to supervise children to discourage hand-to-mouth contact, prevent contact with manure or soiled animal bedding, encourage proper hand hygiene, prevent children from feeding unauthorized food to the animals and prevent situations that could cause injuries or aggressive animal behaviour.
- Use barriers, gates and signs to prevent uncontrolled access to animals and animal areas.
- Make sure animal areas and other sections of the petting zoo are clearly defined and identified with signs and labels. Clearly mark out entrances and exits of animal areas.

## No Food/Drink in Animal Areas

No food or drink, smoking, toys, pacifiers, spill-proof cups or baby bottles should be allowed in animal areas. People who touch their mouths with their hands without washing their hands after interacting with the animals greatly increase their chances of getting infected.

Animal areas should be well-marked separate areas. Food should only be allowed outside these areas with hand hygiene facilities provided in between.

## Food/Drink Outside Animal Areas

Animals, except service animals (those that serve people with disabilities), must not be allowed in eating areas or food preparation areas where they may increase the risk of disease.

## First Aid Facilities

It's always best to be prepared. For that reason, make sure you have a well-stocked first aid kit on hand that can easily be reached by staff and the public – especially since children often get scrapes.

## Injury Prevention and Control

- Any animal bite or other animal contact that may result in rabies in people must, by law, be reported immediately to the local Medical Officer of Health.
- You should have written procedures for dealing with the possibility of injured staff and guests and for animals escaping from enclosures, and train staff on those procedures.

## Keeping Animals Healthy

Healthy animals will create a safer, happier and more enjoyable environment for everyone involved. Check their health regularly especially if they interact with visitors.

Petting zoo operators should work with a veterinarian to develop a preventive care program for all animals, including vaccination and parasite control.

Establish isolation areas for animals that are sick, injured, distressed or potentially dangerous, which should include isolation from other animals and the public as well as appropriate veterinary care.

## Keep Animal Areas Clean

One of the best ways to make sure that your animals stay healthy and that your staff and guests are protected from zoonotic infections is to keep the animals' living areas clean. Clean up their waste by removing manure and soiled animal bedding as soon as possible. Also, if possible, clean, rinse and disinfect animal areas at least once a day; if not, continue to remove fresh organic material regularly and clean all surfaces well.

Avoid transporting manure or soiled bedding through non-animal areas. Otherwise, make sure it is placed in enclosed containers to avoid spilling or contamination.

Thoroughly clean, rinse and disinfect all areas where animals have been displayed before those areas are used for future public (non-animal) events.

## Identification of Animals

It's important for you, your staff and your visitors to easily identify one animal from another. Each animal in the petting zoo should have an individual marker (such as an ear tag or collar). That would make it easy, for example, for your visitor to identify an animal that he or she thought was behaving strangely.

## Visitor Education

Petting zoo operators should:

- Learn about the health risks of direct and indirect animal contact and how to reduce these risks. Operators should be able to explain how to reduce the risks to staff and visitors.
- Provide educational materials such as signs, handouts and stickers, and make them available to your visitors before they visit or before entering the zoo.
- Make sure information is simple and easy-to-understand and geared to the age and language of your visitors. Use pictures or multiple languages so the information can be understood by all visitors.
- Consider sending pre-visit information to schools on how to safely interact with animals.
- Tell visitors to immediately report bites, scratches and other injuries to staff.
- Post signs that are reminders to wash hands at exits from animal areas and in non-animal areas where food is served and eaten.

## Inform Your Public Health Unit

Verbally inform your local public health unit when and where you will be operating your petting zoo before, or as soon as you open your business. Provide them with your contact information, including how they can reach you if your petting zoo moves to a new location. In case of an outbreak, it is important that your contact information is easily accessible.