



**Community Infection Prevention and Control
Guidance for Health and Social Care**

Animals in Health and Social Care Premises

**ANIMALS IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL
CARE PREMISES**

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ANIMALS IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE PREMISES

ANIMALS IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE PREMISES

1. Introduction

The presence of pets or visiting animals may enhance the quality of life for the sick, elderly and infirm. However, disease can be acquired through contact with animals.

The manager must be consulted and guidelines agreed before any animal can be accepted for the premises.

Animals associated with infection

Animal	Disease
Dogs and cats	Salmonella
	Campylobacter
	Toxocara
	Toxoplasma
Birds	Chlamydia psittaci
Terrapins	Salmonella
Exotic pets, e.g., snakes, lizards, iguanas	Salmonella
Ponies, horses, donkeys	Salmonella
	Ringworm

2. Choice of animal

The following factors require consideration for the long-term commitment of owning any animal:

- which member(s) of staff will hold responsibility for the animal?
- what is the service user's preference?
- is the animal suitable for the environment and its restrictions?
- are there any staff/service users allergies or objections?
- feeding arrangements
- grooming arrangements
- can the animal be kept out of kitchen/food areas?
- veterinary arrangements
- cleaning/disposal of excrement arrangements
- equipment – purchase and cleaning.

3. Veterinary care

- All animals must be screened by a veterinary practitioner prior to being introduced to the premises.
- Animal vaccinations must be up to date.
- Animals must be checked yearly by a veterinary practitioner.
- Person responsible must ensure records of the pet vaccinations and veterinary care are kept up to date.
- Only introduce pets to service users after the pet has been adequately wormed and vaccinated.

4. Food and feeding

- Hygienic practices must be observed at all times, e.g., handwashing.
- Fresh water should be available at all times.
- Feeding areas should be kept clean and pest free.
- Pet food should be stored in a designated area (not in the refrigerator with service user's/staff member's food).
- Once opened, canned food should be used the same day.
- Commercial pet foods are preferable.
- Moist food should be removed after 4 hours if not eaten.
- Feeding dishes and containers must be washed after each feed.
- Dried pet food must be clearly labelled.
- Animals should not be fed in the kitchen.

5. Waste and litter

- Do not store the litter tray near food storage, preparation or eating areas.
- Litter boxes and cages should be lined for easy cleaning.
- Always wear disposable gloves and a disposable apron when cleaning and emptying litter trays or cages and handling animal faeces.
- Litter should be changed daily.
- Litter trays should be cleaned and disinfected weekly, or before if visibly soiled.

- Take care when disposing of animal faeces. Use a 'poop scoop' and dispose of contents into a disposable bag and place into a designated bin or into the general waste system.
- When the task is completed, dispose of gloves and apron and wash hands.

Pregnant women should not undertake any of the tasks listed above because of the risk of toxoplasmosis.

6. General precautions

- Animals should not be permitted to lick service users.
- After touching animals, staff and service users should wash their hands thoroughly. Moist skin wipes should be offered to service users that are unable to access hand washing facilities.
- Cleaning schedules and records should include all aspects of the pet's eating, drinking and accommodation, e.g., bowls, bottles, bedding, bed, cage, hutch, aquarium, fishbowl, etc.
- Keep bedding and feeding equipment scrupulously clean (machine washable bedding is advised).
- Wash feeding or other equipment separate from staff or service users' utensils/equipment in warm soapy water.
- Animals must be kept well groomed and clean.
- Seek advice immediately if the animal is unwell.

7. Staff care

- All staff should be aware of the hygiene considerations following the handling of animals, cleaning, feeding and/or other equipment.
- Skin lesions/cuts/abrasions should be adequately covered.
- Hands must be washed thoroughly after feeding/handling animals.
- Food must not be shared with the animals.
- Animals should be prevented from licking staff.

8. Bites/scratches

- Animal claws should be trimmed to reduce the risk of scratches. If a bite or scratch from an animal occurs, it should be washed with soap and warm water, dried and covered with a waterproof dressing.

- Seek medical attention if necessary. Antibiotics and tetanus vaccination may be indicated for flesh penetrating wounds.
- Animal bites can occasionally cause serious infections, particularly in immuno-suppressed persons.
- Medical advice should be sought if in doubt.

9. Deceased animals

Make all arrangements with the veterinary practitioner who is responsible and he/she will advise the correct course of action. There may be charges involved for this service.

10. Visiting animals

Various organisations work throughout the UK who arrange to bring pets into hospitals and other health and social care premises for the benefit of the clients, e.g., PAT (Pets as Therapy). All volunteers must ensure that the pets used are registered with the appropriate scheme.

The animals used are usually dogs and the following guidance should apply:

- the dog must be an adult
- must be house trained
- regularly de-wormed
- regularly treated for fleas
- fully vaccinated
- visits should not take place if the dog is unwell
- animals must be kept away from other clients with phobias or allergies
- hands must be washed after all contact with the animal. Moist skin wipes should be offered to service users that are unable to access hand washing facilities.

Assistance dogs

The Equality Act 2010 says that reasonable adjustments must be made in order to avoid discriminating against people with disabilities. These include waiving a 'no dogs policy' in order that a disabled person may be accompanied by their Recognised Assistance Dog.

All Recognised Assistance Dog owners carry a card advising that assistance dogs should not be a risk to health and hygiene. It is a requirement that all Recognised Assistance Dogs must be regularly de-fleaed, wormed and vaccinated in accordance with the latest veterinary advice and also receive regular health assessments by vets.

The assistance dog is the responsibility of its user with regard to keeping it under control, discipline, toileting, exercising, provision of water, coping with the dog's sudden illness, etc. This responsibility is promoted by the assistance dog charities and forms part of the user's training.

In the unlikely event that it is necessary for the dogs excreta to be cleared up by staff, refer to the above Section 5 Waste and litter.

In extreme cases, or if the occurrence happens more than once during the visit, the user should be asked to remove the dog from the premises.

Assistance dogs are working animals, not pets and through training, recognise when they are 'on duty'. Distraction may jeopardise the safety of the user, therefore, it is important that assistance dogs are not petted or distracted without the user's permission. Always ask the dog user whether you can talk to or pet the dog and do not be offended if the answer is no.

11. Feral animals

This refers to animals that are not domesticated and live in the wild. Common examples include wild cats, squirrels and foxes.

They should not be fed or attracted to health and social care premises as they can become a nuisance or risk to health.

Care must be exercised when dealing with any stray or wild animal, as they may have contracted disease from another wild animal.

12. Exotic/tropical pets

Examples include exotic birds, tropical fish, insects and reptiles. Many of these animals require very specialist care that is different to caring for common domestic pets. They can suffer from stress and this damages their immune system, which increases the risk of transmitting opportunistic infections to humans.

These exotic pets are not recommended for purchase within health and social care premises.

Fish tanks

Fish tanks can pose an infection hazard and need stringent management if purchased.

- Tanks should not be sited in areas where immunocompromised service users are cared for.

- Tanks must be kept sealed and located in a dayroom or reception area.
- Service users and visitors must not have direct access to the water as it will be heavily contaminated with micro-organisms.
- Fish food is also frequently contaminated with pathogenic micro-organisms such as Salmonella, therefore, hands must be washed thoroughly after handling fish food.
- A maintenance contract with an aquarium maintenance specialist must be established.

13. Farm visits

Farm visits can be fun and also a useful aid to stimulation, but sensible precautions are recommended and include the following:

- wash and dry hands thoroughly after touching the animals
- pregnant women should avoid contact with sheep during the lambing season and for 6 weeks after it has finished
- do not eat or drink while going around the farm. Eat only in designated areas
- do not put your face against the animal
- do not put your hands in your mouth after touching the animal
- do not touch any animal droppings
- clean shoes and wheelchair or pushchair wheels when leaving the farm and wash hands thoroughly.

14. Additional IPC resources

The North Yorkshire and York Community Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) team have produced a wide range of innovative educational and other IPC resources. These resources are designed to assist your organisation in achieving compliance with the Health and Social Care Act 2008 and CQC requirements. Further information on these high quality evidence-based resources is available at www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk

15. References

Assistance Dogs UK www.assistancedogs.org.uk/ [accessed 28 October 2014]

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