

Staying Safe at Petting Zoos and Fairs

Are petting zoos and fairs safe?

Petting zoos and fairs give people of all ages the exciting opportunity to interact with animals face-to-face. This allows people to learn more about animals but it can also put people at risk of becoming ill from these animals. This fact sheet is meant to help you understand the risks and then give you ways to minimize them. We encourage people to interact with animals while at the same time taking precautions.

What are zoonotic diseases?

Zoonotic diseases are infectious diseases that can be transmitted between animals and people.

What are some examples of germs that cause diarrheal zoonotic diseases?

- Campylobacter (bacteria)
- Salmonella (bacteria)
- E. coli O157:H7 (bacteria)
- Yersinia enterocolitica (bacteria)
- Cryptosporidium (parasite)

Is it common to find these types of germs at a petting zoo or fair?

Yes, some germs are naturally in the intestines of healthy livestock and poultry and are found in the animals' feces. Even if an animal appears healthy, it could still pass these germs to you. However, some germs, like Cryptosporidium, can also make animals sick.

How do people get sick from these germs?

People get sick from these germs by swallowing them. Once the germs are on your hands, you can accidentally get them in your mouth while eating, drinking, or during other hand-to-mouth activities such as smoking or thumb sucking. These germs may end up on your hands after contact with:

- Cattle
- Pigs
- Sheep
- Goats
- Ducks
- Chickens
- Turkeys
- Animal environments

Baby animals are especially likely to have these germs because they haven't had a chance to become immune to them.

What are the symptoms in people?

The most common symptoms are diarrhea and abdominal pain. Other symptoms may include vomiting, fever, cramps, and bloody diarrhea. People with mild symptoms usually recover without treatment. However, these illnesses can lead to hospitalizations and severe complications also can occur.

How can I reduce my risk of getting sick from animals at a petting zoo or fair?

- Wash your hands with soap and running water for at least 20 seconds upon exiting animal areas even if you did not touch an animal.
- If no running water and soap is available, hand sanitizer may be used until you are able to wash your hands.
- Wash your hands before you eat, drink, smoke, or chew (tobacco, gum, etc.).
- Keep food, drinks, baby bottles, pacifiers, and toys out of animal areas.
- Park strollers outside of animal areas.
- Children younger than 5 years old should be supervised while interacting with the animals and during hand washing. Young children are more likely to get sick because they often touch surfaces contaminated with animal stool and are more likely to put their hands in their mouths.

How can I keep from bringing these germs into my home?

Germs can stay on the clothing and shoes you wear while interacting with animals and you can spread these germs to other people who haven't been at the petting zoo or fair. After you have visited a petting zoo or fair, remove your shoes before coming in the main part of the house and change your clothes once you're inside. These steps will help reduce the risk of illness for you, and your family and friends.

For more information, visit the Minnesota Department of Health website at www.health.state.mn.us or call 651-201-5414. For more information on the Upper Midwest Agricultural Safety and Health (UMASH) Center, please visit the website at www.umash.umn.edu.



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