
Stay Healthy at Animal Exhibits

Interacting with animals at fairs, zoos, and aquariums can be educational and fun, but it's important to remember that animals sometimes carry harmful germs that can make us sick. Learn how to stay healthy when visiting animal exhibits.

There are many ways to explore the animal world, and many people choose to visit animal exhibits to learn about and interact with animals. Animal exhibits like zoos, petting zoos, aquariums, fairs, and farms are popular places for children to experience and learn



from animals they may not see in their daily lives. Although animal exhibits can be educational and fun, it's important to know that even animals at these exhibits can sometimes carry germs that can make people sick, even when the animal appears healthy.

Every year, many people get sick after visiting an animal exhibit. From 2010-2015, about 100 outbreaks of illness in people linked to animals in public settings like zoos, fairs, and educational farms were reported to public health officials. Some of the most common harmful germs people get from animals at exhibits are *E. coli* O157:H7, *Cryptosporidium*, and *Salmonella* infections, but there are also many other types of germs that can spread between animals and people. If you forget to wash your hands after petting an animal, or bring food or drinks into an area with animals, you increase your chance of getting sick. Even animals that look clean and healthy can carry harmful germs, and areas where animals live or roam can be contaminated – you don't have to touch an animal to get sick. Adults over 65 years of age, children 5 years of age and younger, and people with weakened immune systems are more likely to get sick from the germs animals can carry, and should take extra precautions at animal exhibits.

Below are some tips to help you stay healthy when visiting animal exhibits.

How to Stay Healthy at Animal Exhibits

Wash Your Hands Often

- Find out where handwashing stations are located.
- Always wash your hands right after petting animals or touching anything in animal areas (where they live, roam, or eat).
- Wash your hands when you leave animal areas, even if you did not touch the animals.



Handwashing is important. Remember to wash your hands right after petting animals and when you leave animal areas, even if you did not touch an animal.

- Running water and soap are best. If running water and soap are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Wash your hands with soap and water as soon as a sink is available.
- Learn more about [when and how to wash hands](#).

Eat and Drink Safely

- Keep food and drinks out of animal areas.
- Don't prepare, serve, or eat food in animal areas (with the exception of service animals, or animals that assist people with disabilities).
- Don't share your food with animals, to keep yourself and the animals healthy. Animals should eat the food made for them.
- Don't eat or drink raw (unpasteurized) products made or sold at animal exhibits, including milk, cheese, cider, and juice.
- Remember: Wash your hands before preparing food or drinks and before eating and drinking.



Always supervise children around animals.

Keep Children Safe Around Animals

- [Young children](#) are more likely to get sick from harmful germs that animals can carry. For this reason, CDC recommends children 5 years of age and younger not have contact with reptiles, amphibians, and live poultry including baby chicks and ducklings because these animals are commonly associated with outbreaks of disease.
- Children **always** need adult supervision around animals.

- Never allow children to put their thumbs, fingers, or objects (like pacifiers) in their mouths when they're around animals or in an animal area.
- Encourage and supervise handwashing.
- Do not take or use strollers, bottles, pacifiers, spill-proof cups, or toys into animal areas.

If You Manage or Design an Animal Exhibit

- Design the exhibit to separate animal areas from places where people eat.
- Use signs to point out the areas (<http://www.nasphv.org/documentsCompendiumAnimals.html>) where people can eat, and the areas for animals.
- Install handwashing stations at exits of animal exhibits. Make sure that some of the handwashing stations are low enough for children to reach.
- Use plain language and pictures to show visitors how to stay safe and healthy when visiting animal exhibits.

Education/Information

- Encourage visitors to wash their hands after visiting or handling animals.
- Be aware that healthy animals can carry germs that might make visitors sick.
- Train staff and educate visitors about preventing disease transmission between humans and animals.
- Use a variety of methods to provide information to the public. For example, use brochures, signs, and verbal instructions. See available resources for educating visitors.

For more information on keeping your visitors healthy: Read the [Compendium of Measures to Prevent Disease Associated with Animals in Public Settings, 2017](#)

(<https://avmajournals.avma.org/doi/pdf/10.2460/javma.251.11.1268>) .

More Information

- Websites
 - Healthy Pets, Healthy People
 - Farm Animals
 - Information on Contact with Animals in Public Settings
- Educational posters (available in multiple languages):
 - Poster: Wash Hands When Leaving Animal Exhibit [681 KB]
 - Spanish [693 KB]
 - French
 - Know How to be Safe Around Animals!
 - 5 Things to do right after visiting animals
 - Stay healthy around animals
 - How Infected Backyard Poultry Could Spread Bird Flu to People [555 KB]
 - Take Action to Prevent the Spread of Flu Between Pigs and People [1.29 MB]
- Podcasts
 - Wash Your Hands if You Pet That Bunny [7:15 minutes]: (<http://www2c.cdc.gov/podcasts/player.asp?f=5989>) more information on reducing health risks for visits to state fairs, petting zoos, and pet

stores

- I Love Petting Zoos! [3:27 minutes] (<http://www2c.cdc.gov/podcasts/player.asp?f=955042>) [Spanish (<https://www2c.cdc.gov/podcasts/player.asp?f=1081959>)]

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(<https://www.cdc.gov/Other/plugins/>)

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