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Healthy Interactions with Animals at Fairs and Other Animal Events

Authors: Sara Tomis and Jennifer Cushman


Sara.tomis@uconn.edu

Reviewers: Dr. Kathy Kudish (DVM, MSPH), CT Department of Public Health

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Introduction

Fairs and other events involving animals can be memory-makers for the whole family. However, understanding how to keep everyone healthy while attending is important, especially when engaging with the animals and their handlers. 

This fact sheet is for people interested in learning proper hygiene practices for interacting with animals in public settings.

Zoonotic diseases

Zoonotic diseases are illnesses that can be transferred between people and animals. Examples include *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, and Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (i.e., HPAI, Bird Flu).

These diseases can pose health risks to people, especially those that are younger than five years of age, older and pregnant adults, and people with immunocompromising conditions.

Zoonotic germs are naturally found in the digestive system of many animals present at fairs and other agricultural events, such as cattle, sheep, goats, and poultry. Livestock and poultry can shed zoonotic germs while still appearing healthy. Therefore, practicing healthy hygiene around animals is vitally important.

Tips for Staying Safe and Healthy

Germs can be transmitted in a number of ways, including via direct contact with infected feces, fur, and saliva, as well as contaminated surfaces such as gates and fences. Follow these tips to maintain health around animals:

- Always wash your hands after interacting with animals and items in their surroundings, including pens and cages. Do not touch your face or phone before washing your hands. If you do not have access to running water, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer will help to reduce the germs on your hands.
- Don't eat, drink, or touch, or put anything in your mouth or touch your eyes while in animal areas (barns, show arenas). Do not smoke or vape in barns.
- Don't take toys, pacifiers, cups, bottles, strollers, or similar items into the animal areas.
- If an object falls on the ground in an animal area, wash and/or disinfect it thoroughly before using it. This includes cell phones, pacifiers, sunglasses, and other items.
- Pay special attention to young children: do not permit children to place contaminated hands or objects in their mouths or make face-to-face contact with an animal. Do not allow children to sit directly on the ground in animal areas, or permit them to play with soiled hay.
- Teach children to approach animals with caution. Don't allow them to pet an animal directly on its face, as this may lead to exposure to nasal discharge and saliva. If an animal appears ill, stay away and let an exhibitor know. Always ask before petting an animal at a fair or event, as they may be prepared for exhibition.
- Take special care when interacting with young animals, as they are likely to have germs, since they have not had a chance to build up their immune systems yet. Children under five should not have direct contact with poultry (CDC, 2024), which includes chickens, ducks, and geese.
- Consider wearing closed-toed shoes when visiting the fair. While walking through barns and animal areas, avoid stepping in manure. If there is a disinfecting mat at the exit of the barn, use it to clean your shoes.
- After coming home from a fair or animal exhibit, leave your shoes outside and change any clothes that were soiled by saliva or other animal fluids. If your skin or hair was contaminated by any fluids, take a shower.
- Stay up to date on current zoonotic disease outbreaks, such as Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (i.e., HPAI, bird flu), for additional recommendations.

Proper Hand Washing Technique

Hand washing is a critical step in keeping you and your family healthy when interacting with animals. Proper handwashing includes using soap and clean running water, scrubbing soapy hands for at least 20 seconds, being sure to remove any debris from under the fingers. Thoroughly rinse the soap and use a clean paper towel to dry your hands and to turn the faucet off.

Watch *How Can You Maintain Hygiene Around Animals* to learn more:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fg3WRuvMpkQ>

How Can You Maintain Hygiene Around Animals? - #AskUC...



Conclusions

Attending agricultural fairs and other animal events can be a fun and enjoyable experience for the whole family. Practice proper hygiene to stay safe and healthy during fair season.

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Resources

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