

Guidelines for Animals in School Settings

Animals are effective and valuable teaching aids, but safeguards are required to reduce the risk for infection and injury. These abbreviated recommendations are based on guidelines developed by the Alabama Department of Public Health* and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment†. Recommendations are also available from the National Science Teachers Association§ and the National Association of Biology Teachers.¶

General Guidelines for School Settings**

- Wash hands after contact with animals, animal products, or animal environments.
- Supervise human-animal contact, particularly for children aged <5 years.
- Display animals in enclosed cages or under appropriate restraint.
- Designate specific areas for animal contact.
- Do not allow food in animal contact areas; do not allow animals in areas where food and drink are prepared or consumed.
- Do not allow animals to roam, fly free, or have contact with wild animals.
- Clean and disinfect all areas where animals have been present. Children should only perform this task while supervised by an adult.
- Obtain appropriate veterinary care, a certificate of veterinary inspection, and/or proof of rabies vaccination according to local or state requirements.
- Keep animals clean and free of intestinal parasites, fleas, ticks, mites, and lice.
- Parents should be informed of the benefits and potential risks associated with animals in school classrooms. Consult with parents to determine special considerations needed for children who are immunocompromised, who have allergies, or who have asthma.
- Ensure that personnel providing animals for educational purposes are knowledgeable regarding animal handling and zoonotic disease issues. Individuals or facilities that display animals to the public should be licensed by the USDA.

Animal-Specific Guidelines

- Fish --- Use disposable gloves when cleaning aquariums, and do not dispose of aquarium water in sinks used for food preparation or for obtaining drinking water.
- Nonpsittacine birds --- See General Guidelines.
- Psittacine birds (e.g., parrots, parakeets, and cockatiels) --- Consult the psittacosis compendium, †† and seek veterinary advice. Use birds treated or testing negative for avian chlamydiosis.
- Domestic dogs, cats, rabbits, and rodents (e.g., mice, rats, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, and chinchillas) --- See General Guidelines.
- Baby chicks and ducks --- To prevent *Salmonella* or *Campylobacter* infection, children aged <5 years should not have contact with baby chicks and ducks.
- Reptiles (including turtles, lizards, and snakes) and amphibians --- To prevent *Salmonella* infection, children aged <5 years should not have contact with reptiles and amphibians.
- Ferrets --- To prevent bites, children aged <5 years should not have direct contact with ferrets.
- Farm animals --- See General Guidelines. Certain animals (e.g., young ruminants and young poultry) excrete *E. coli* O157:H7, *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, and *Cryptosporidium* intermittently and in substantial numbers; therefore, these animals are not appropriate unless meticulous attention to personal hygiene can be assured.

- Mammals at high risk for transmitting rabies (e.g., bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes, and coyotes) --- Students should not be permitted to touch these animals, nor are these animals appropriate as residents in the classroom.
- Owl pellets --- Assume owl pellets to be contaminated with *Salmonella*. Dissections should not be done in areas where food is consumed. Thoroughly clean and disinfect contact surfaces. Wash hands after contact.

Animals Not Recommended in School Settings

- Inherently dangerous animals (e.g., lions, tigers, cougars, and bears).
- Nonhuman primates (e.g., monkeys and apes).
- Mammals at higher risk for transmitting rabies (e.g., bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes, and coyotes).
- Aggressive or unpredictable animals, wild or domestic.
- Stray animals with unknown health and vaccination history.
- Venomous or toxin-producing spiders, insects, reptiles, and amphibians.

* W.B. Johnston, DVM, Alabama Department of Public Health, personal communication, 2002.

† Hansen GR. Animals in Kansas schools: guidelines for visiting and resident pets. Topeka, KA: Kansas Department of Health and Environment; 2004. Available at <http://www.kdhe.state.ks.us/pdf/hef/ab1007.pdf>.

§ National Science Teachers Association. Standards for Science Teacher Preparation. Arlington, VA: National Science Teachers Association; 2003. Available at <http://www.nsta.org/main/pdfs/NSTASTandards2003.pdf>.

¶ National Association of Biology Teachers. The use of animals in biology education. Reston, VA: National Association of Biology Teachers; 1995. Available at http://www.nabt.org/sub/position_statements/animals.asp.

** Guide, hearing, or other service animals and law enforcement animals can be used when they are under the control of a person familiar with the specific animal and in accordance with recommendations from the sponsoring organizations.

†† National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians. Compendium of measures to control *Chlamydothila psittaci* infection among humans (psittacosis) and pet birds (avian chlamydiosis), 2006. Available at <http://www.nasphv.org/83416/index.html>.