Welcome to this public health factsheet which provides information on how to avoid the risk of infection on farm visits, while still encouraging families and schools to continue to visit farms and learn about the environment and rural culture.

Visiting a farm is an enjoyable and educational experience for many people, particularly children. However, such visits can never be free from all risks. Farm animals may carry a number of infections that can be harmful to people. Common types of illness include infection with Cryptosporidium parvum, E. coli O157 and Salmonella.

Individual cases of illness and outbreaks linked to petting farms have been reported in North Yorkshire.

Avoiding Infection on Farm Visits

Issued April 2016

Facts

- Cases of E. coli O157 linked to farm attractions are at their highest levels between June and October. Very few individual organisms are needed to cause infection. Illness ranges from diarrhoea to kidney failure and in some cases the illness can be fatal.

- People can become infected by micro-organisms such as E. coli O157 or Cryptosporidium parvum through consuming contaminated food or drink, through direct contact with contaminated animals, or by contact with an environment contaminated with animal faeces.

- Cases of Cryptosporidiosis are often associated with the lambing season in spring. Disease may cause abdominal pain with ‘flu like’ symptoms for up to 6 weeks.

- Salmonella can cause diarrhoea, fever and abdominal pains. Occasionally more serious illness will result.

- Washing your hands thoroughly with liquid soap and warm running water and drying with disposable paper towels immediately after you have touched animals (including bottle feeding lambs), fences or other surfaces in animal areas will reduce the risk of infection.

- Handrubs or wipes are not a substitute for washing your hands with warm running water.
What to do when visiting a farm

- Don’t put hands on faces or fingers in mouths while petting animals or walking round the farm.
- Don’t kiss farm animals or allow children to put their faces close to animals.
- Don’t eat or drink while touching animals or walking round the farm. This includes not eating sweets, crisps or chewing gum.
- Don’t taste or eat any animal foods or unpasteurised produce, such as milk or cheese.
- Don’t eat anything that has fallen on the floor.
- Don’t use handrubs or wipes instead of washing hands with liquid soap and warm water. Handrubs and wipes do not remove *E. coli* O157 in dirt.

Teachers or people organising visits can download “Advice to Teachers and Others who organise visits for children” at www.face-online.org.uk/resources/preventing-or-controlling-ill-health-from-animal-contact-at-visitor-attractions-industry-code-of-practice.

If anyone is sick or has diarrhoea within two weeks after a farm visit contact your GP or call NHS 111 as soon as possible. If anyone, particularly a young child has bloody diarrhoea, seek immediate emergency medical attention.

Pregnant women

Pregnant women who come into close contact with sheep during lambing or other farm animals that are giving birth may risk their own health, and that of their unborn child, from infections that such animals can carry. Although the number of human pregnancies affected by contact with an infected animal is extremely small, it is important that pregnant women are aware of the potential risks and take appropriate precautions. These risks are not only associated with sheep, nor confined only to the spring (when the majority of lambs are born). Cattle and goats that have recently given birth can also carry similar infections.

To avoid the possible risk of infection:

- Pregnant women should not help ewes to lamb, or to provide assistance with a cow that is calving or a nanny goat that is kidding.
- Pregnant women should avoid contact with aborted or new-born lambs, calves or kids or with the afterbirth, birthing fluids or materials (e.g. bedding) contaminated by such birth products.
- Pregnant women should ensure contacts or partners who have attended lambing ewes or other animals giving birth take appropriate health and hygiene precautions, including the wearing of personal protective equipment and perform good hand hygiene to remove any potential contamination.
- Pregnant women should avoid handling (including washing) clothing, boots or any materials that may have come into contact with animals that have recently given birth, their young or afterbirths. Potentially contaminated clothing will be safe to handle after being washed at the highest temperature recommended by the manufacturer.

Further information for pregnant women in the lambing season is available on the PHE website: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/infectious-diseases-during-pregnancy-screening-vaccination-and-treatment#infection-risks-during-lambing-season
Farm Workers

Farmers have a responsibility to minimise the risks to pregnant women, including members of their family, the public and professional staff visiting farms. Farmers should consult their vet about suitable vaccination programmes and other disease control measures. The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) regulations 2002 require employers to assess risks to health from harmful substances and take steps to prevent or control those risks.

Further information on zoonoses and appropriate control measures can be found on the Health & Safety Executive website [http://www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/topics/zoonoses.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/topics/zoonoses.htm).

Policy Context/References

1. Preventing or controlling ill health from animal contact at visitor attractions:
   - Code of Practice V2
   - Summary of Control Measures
   - Preventing or controlling ill health from animal contact at visitor attractions: Advice to Teachers and Others who organise visits for children [Access to Farm Partnership, March 2015](http://www.face-online.org.uk/resources/preventing-or-controlling-ill-health-from-animal-contact-at-visitor-attractions-industry-code-of-practice).


Resources

PHE

Contact us

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Environmental Health Teams

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Websites

Information on infections acquired through animals.

e-bug (PHE) [www.e-bug.eu/](http://www.e-bug.eu/)
Educational resources to learn about microbes

NHS Choices [www.nhs.uk/](http://www.nhs.uk/)
How to avoid catching infections from animals.

Visit My Farm [www.visitmyfarm.org/](http://www.visitmyfarm.org/)
Information hub for farmers and teachers looking for help on educational visits to farms.