



County of Fairfax, Virginia

To protect and enrich the quality of life for the people, neighborhoods and diverse communities of Fairfax County

30 April 2019

Dear Petting Zoo Operator or Animal Exhibitor,

Interacting with animals at petting zoos or exhibits provides a unique educational experience for the public, particularly children. Most visitors to animal venues, however, are not aware of the infectious disease health risks associated with animals. The Fairfax County Health Department (FCHD) asks for your collaboration to minimize health risks to the public while allowing for a rewarding animal encounter at your exhibit.

Contact with animals and animal feces can result in serious infections if proper precautions are not followed. Approximately 150 human disease outbreaks from 1996-2010 were associated with visits to animal exhibits. Illnesses caused by *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, and *E. coli* are reported each year for visitors to fairs, petting zoos, and farms. Livestock, such as cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs, are often the sources for infection. Rabbits, reptiles, and other exotic animals can also be infection sources. Animals with infectious organisms often do not show signs of illness but still shed the pathogens and contaminate the environment.

Another significant public health concern associated with animal exhibits is rabies, which is endemic in Fairfax County. Rabies is a virus transmitted by saliva, usually from a bite or deep scratch from an infected mammal, such as foxes, raccoons, dogs, cats, or livestock. To prevent rabies, it is vital that you work with your veterinarian to ensure all mammals are vaccinated against rabies. Any animal bite to a visitor or staff should be reported immediately to the **Fairfax County Animal Protection Police (APP)** by calling **703-691-2131** to ensure proper follow-up. All known or suspect bites to your animals by wildlife should also be reported to the APP so they can protect your animals and the public from rabies.

To ensure the health and safety of visitors to your exhibits, staff working with the animals, and of the animals themselves, it is important to implement protection measures at your facility/exhibit. These include access to handwashing stations, guidelines on proper hand-washing, adult supervision of young children, proper animal husbandry (including vaccination), protocols for ill employees, proper petting zoo design, and animal bite reporting. Tips for keeping your animal exhibit safe and educational flyers for your venue are enclosed.

The educational flyers are designed to be posted **1) at the entrance of the exhibit, 2) at the exit, and 3) at the hand washing facility.**

If you have any questions, please contact the FCHD Communicable Disease Section at 703-246-2433. Our staff routinely investigates cases and outbreaks of communicable diseases in the community and works with facilities to recommend best practices for infection control. Upon request, we would be happy to provide training on key infection control recommendations to your staff. Please let us know how we can provide additional assistance to continue to protect the public and your animals from infectious diseases.

Sincerely,

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