



## FACT SHEET

### Disease Prevention

### for Parents and Childcare Providers

## Animals

Many children like animals and benefit from interacting with them. Unfortunately, there are several different diseases that people can get from animals. These are called zoonotic diseases and can be acquired from livestock, pets, and wild animals. Children are at higher risk for all disease, including zoonotic illnesses.

Animals that may carry zoonotic diseases include:

- Dogs, cats, rodents, cattle, bats, skunks, raccoons, goats, pigs, sheep, chickens and other poultry, birds, horses, snakes, turtles, frogs, other reptiles and amphibians, deer, elk, antelope, and rabbits.

Zoonotic diseases include:

- Rabies, worms, tularemia, toxoplasmosis, psittocosis, ringworm, and plague.
- Disease caused by toxigenic *E.coli*, *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, *Giardia*, and *Cryptosporidium*.

### Rabies

Rabies is a rare but almost always fatal disease that is acquired through animal bites, scratches, or bat exposure where a bite or scratch cannot be ruled out. There is no treatment for this disease once a person starts getting sick, but there are measures that can be taken right after an exposure in order to prevent disease. All animal bites or scratches and all bat exposures should be reported to the Health Department for investigation of rabies risk.

The best way to protect children against rabies is:

- Only allow children to play with healthy, friendly animals that do not bite or scratch.
- Supervise all child-animal interactions.
- Do not allow children to have contact with any unvaccinated animals.
- VACCINATE pets against rabies; keep vaccinations current at all times.
- If you do not know the vaccination status of a pet, do not allow children to play with it.
- If you find a stray animal, do not allow children to play with it until it has been evaluated and vaccinated by a veterinarian and you are sure that it is friendly.
- Do not allow children to touch bats, skunks, raccoons, and other wild animals.

### Worms

Some animals carry worms that can be passed to humans. The best way to protect children against this is to:

- Complete a full course of worming with pets, especially young animals such as puppies and kittens, before letting children play with them. De-worm animals as directed by a veterinarian.

- Wash hands immediately after contact with animal feces or dirt that may contain it, including changing the cat box.
- Do not allow children to go barefoot in areas where there is manure or pet feces.

### Pets

Pets may have disease-causing organisms on their skin, hair, and in their mouth, even if they are clean and healthy.

- Children under 5 should not handle reptiles, baby poultry, rodents, or baby animals with diarrhea.
- Caregivers and children need to wash their hands.
  - After touching animals, cages, fences, and food bowls.
  - After handling animal feces (changing a cat box, cleaning a cage).
  - Before eating.
- Do not handle pets or allow pets in the kitchen or other food prep or storage areas.
- Avoid getting animal saliva in mouth.
- Only allow children to have access to healthy animals (no diarrhea, ringworm).

### Outdoors

Sometimes children can come in contact with animal feces without knowing it; for instance, when caring for or petting animals, and sometimes even when there are no animals present; for instance, when playing in a sand box or in the yard. To be safe:

- Always wash hands after contact with animals or their environment.
- Wash hands when coming in from playing outside.
- Cover sand boxes to keep animals out.
- Do not allow children to touch dead animals.
- Supervise children and teach them to avoid animal feces
  - On the animal's hair or fur.
  - On the ground, in sand.
- Check children's play areas and remove pet or wildlife feces from these areas.
- Keep livestock and poultry out of play areas.
- Remove shoes or boots when you come inside.
- Teach children not to put their hands in their mouth.

### Livestock and poultry

Livestock, poultry, and wildlife have been associated with illnesses caused by toxigenic *E.coli*, *Salmonella*, and *Campylobacter*. Healthy livestock and poultry may shed these bacteria in their feces, and infection with these can cause severe illness, even death, in children. Small children are at high risk for these diseases because they often have hand-to-mouth contact, have no knowledge of disease prevention, and are closer to the ground. Good hand washing practices for children are very important if they are handling livestock or visiting a fair or petting zoo.

### The Best Defense

The best defense to prevent disease from animals is good hand washing practices, especially

- Before eating or having any hand-to-mouth contact.
- After touching animals or their environment.

If you have questions, please call the Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department at (406) 447-8352.