

Community Services – Environmental Health Public Health Fact Sheet

Welcome to this public health factsheet which provides information on how to reduce 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 carry a number of bugs that can be harmful to people.

Common types of illness that can be acquired from farm animals include cryptosporidiosis and shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* (STEC)

Each year, cases of illness linked to animal contact are reported in the Highlands.

Avoiding Infection on Farm Visits

Issued April 2019

Facts

- ◆ Cases of STEC tend to be at their highest levels during the summer.
- ◆ Very few individual bugs are needed to cause infection.
- ◆ STEC commonly causes abdominal pain and diarrhoea which can range from mild to bloody diarrhoea. A small proportion of people develop complications which can lead to kidney failure and in some cases the illness can be fatal.



- ◆ In the context of people visiting a farm, people can become infected with bugs such as shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* or *Cryptosporidium parvum* 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. Crypto commonly causes diarrhoea and abdominal pain.
- ◆ Handrubs or wipes **are not** a substitute for washing your hands with warm running water.
- ◆ 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.

What to do when visiting a farm

	
✓ Do check that cuts, grazes etc. on children's hands are covered with waterproof dressings.	✗ Don't put hands on faces or fingers in mouths while petting animals or walking round the farm.
✓ Do wash your hands thoroughly with liquid soap and warm water and dry with paper towels:- ◆ after you have touched animals, fences or other surfaces in animal areas; ◆ before eating or drinking.	✗ Don't kiss farm animals or put your face close to animals.
✓ Do remove and clean boots or shoes that might have become soiled and clean pushchair wheels. Then wash your hands thoroughly with liquid soap and warm water and dry with paper towels.	✗ Don't eat or drink while touching animals or walking round the farm. This includes not eating sweets, crisps or chewing gum.
✓ Do supervise children closely to ensure that they wash their hands thoroughly.	✗ Don't taste or eat any animal feed
✓ Do eat and drink in picnic areas or cafes only	✗ 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

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 after a farm visit contact your GP or call NHS 24 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 these infections are very unusual, 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>

Responsibilities of Farmers

Farmers have a responsibility to minimise the risks posed to others. Farmers should consult their vet about suitable vaccination programmes and other disease control measures.

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) regulations 2002² 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>

Resources

PHE

Avoiding infection on farm visits. Advice for the public.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/farm-visits-avoiding-infection>

Websites

Public Health England

www.hpa.org.uk/Topics/InfectiousDiseases/InfectionsAZ/Zoonoses/

Information on infections acquired through animals.



e-bug (PHE)

www.e-bug.eu/

Educational resources to learn about microbes



NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/

How to avoid catching infections from animals.



Visit My Farm

www.visitmyfarm.org/

Information hub for farmers and teachers looking for help on educational visits to farms.



Contact Us

For further information or advice, please contact the Environmental Health Service on Tel: 01349 886603 or Email: envhealth@highland.gov.uk