



Avoiding infection on farm visits

Advice for the public

Farm visits and risks

Visiting a farm is an enjoyable and educational experience for many people, particularly children. However, visiting a farm carries a small risk of catching infection from animals or the environment. Farm animals can be the source of several bugs that can be passed from animals to humans and cause illness. Some can be particularly serious for children or pregnant women.

These bugs may not cause animals to be visibly ill so it's difficult to tell whether an animal is infected, especially when they look clean and healthy.

Infection can be picked up from the animal's body, its poo or from areas where animals have recently been. If the bugs are on your hands, you could accidentally pass them to your mouth. You can't see the germs, so your hands may appear clean.

Washing your hands thoroughly with soap and hot running water immediately after you have had contact with animals will reduce the risk of infection. Hand gels or wipes are not a substitute for washing your hands with soap and hot running water although they are better than nothing if soap and hot running water is not available.

What to do when visiting a farm

Following the simple rules listed below will help to keep you and your children safe from infections that may be found on open farms. Pregnant women need to take particular care as infections acquired from animals can be harmful to them and their unborn baby.

- do wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after you have touched animals, fences or other surfaces in animal areas
- do wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before eating or drinking

- do remove and clean boots or shoes that might have become soiled and clean pushchair wheels. Then wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water
- do supervise children closely to ensure that they wash their hands thoroughly
- do eat and drink in picnic areas or cafes only
- do not put hands on faces or fingers in mouths while petting animals or walking round the farm
- do not kiss farm animals or allow children to put their faces close to animals
- do not eat or drink while touching animals or walking round the farm. This includes not eating sweets, crisps or chewing gum
- do not eat anything that has fallen on the floor
- do not use gels or wipes instead of washing hands with soap and water. Gels and wipes do not remove bugs in dirt

If you are planning a school or group visit to a farm, you also need to make sure that you've considered all the risks and taken steps to manage them. Guidance is available to help schools and teachers do this (see further information).

What should I do if I feel unwell after a farm visit?

If you or anyone in your group feels unwell or has any symptoms, for example is sick or has diarrhoea within 2 weeks of visiting a farm, contact your GP or call NHS 111 as soon as possible. If you or anyone in your group, particularly a young child, has bloody diarrhoea, seek immediate emergency medical attention.

Children under 5 should not attend school/nursery/group childcare until they have been free of sickness or diarrhoea for 2 days. Tests may be required to confirm that a child is free from infection.

Parents should confirm with their health professional whether it is safe for them to return before the child returns to school or nursery.

Where can I get more information?

Further information on zoonoses – infections that spread from animals to humans – is available at: www.gov.uk/government/collections/zoonotic-diseases-zoonoses-guidance-data-and-analysis

Further information on Shiga toxin-producing *E.coli*, including *E. coli* O157 is available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/vero-cytotoxin-producing-escherichia-coli-symptoms-how-to-avoid-how-to-treat/vero-cytotoxin-producing-escherichia-coli-symptoms-how-to-avoid-how-to-treat

Further information on cryptosporidiosis is available at:

www.gov.uk/government/collections/cryptosporidiosis-guidance-data-and-analysis

Information for teachers on taking children on farm visits is available on the Visit my Farm website:

www.visitmyfarm.org/component/k2/307-controllinginfectiononfarms

Information for pregnant women is available on the NHS website:

www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/pregnancy/why-should-pregnant-women-avoid-sheep-during-the-lambing-season

and the PHE website:

www.gov.uk/guidance/infectious-diseases-during-pregnancy-screening-vaccination-and-treatment#infection-risks-during-lambing-season

Information for farmers is available on the Visit my Farm website:

www.visitmyfarm.org/component/k2/339-industry-code-of-practice/339-industry-code-of-practice

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