

Stay Healthy at Animal Exhibits

With County Fairs just around the corner, I feel this article from the CDC is a great reminder to all of us on how to protect us and our family members from becoming ill.

Interacting with animals at fairs, educational farms, petting zoos, summer camps, aquariums, schools, and other places can be educational and fun, and helps people learn about and experience animals they may not see in their daily lives. However, it is important to know that animals sometimes carry germs that can make people sick.

Every year, many people get sick after visiting an animal exhibit. From 2010-2015, about 100 outbreaks of illness in people linked to animals in public settings like zoos, fairs, and educational farms were reported to public health officials. Some of the most common harmful germs people get from animals at exhibits are *E. coli* O157:H7, *Cryptosporidium*, and *Salmonella* infections, but there are also many other types of germs that can spread between animals and people. Children 5 years of age and younger, people with weakened immune systems, and adults over 65 years of age are more likely to get sick from the germs animals can carry, and should take extra precautions at animal exhibits. If you forget to wash your hands after petting an animal, or bring food or drinks into an area with animals, you increase your chance of getting sick. Even animals that look clean and healthy can carry harmful germs, and areas where animals live or roam can be contaminated – you don't have to touch an animal to get sick.

How to stay healthy if you visit an animal exhibit or have contact with animals in a public setting

Animal encounters such as touching or petting, feeding, and holding animals are becoming more popular, especially at zoos and aquariums. An animal exhibit can be anything from a large zoo to a livestock show at the county fair. You might also encounter animals at schools, as part of local festivals, or just out and about. Wherever you are, it's important to know ways to stay healthy while enjoying animals.

Protect yourself and your family by:

Wash your hands

- Find where the handwashing stations are located.
- Wash your hands right after touching animals or anything in the areas where they live, roam, or eat.
- Wash your hands when you leave animal areas, even if you didn't touch the animals; hands should still be washed if you wore gloves.
- Running water and soap are best, but if they are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol and wash your hands with soap and running water as soon as you can.

Keep food and animals separate

- Don't eat or drink around animals, and keep food and drinks away from animal areas.
- Don't share your food with the animals, even if you think the food is part of the animal's regular diet. Animals should eat the food provided for them by the animal exhibit.
- Don't eat or drink raw (unpasteurized) products. Raw products made or sold at animal exhibits may include: milk, cheese, cider, or juice.

Keep children safe around animals

- **Always** supervise children around animals.
- [Children 5 years of age and younger](#) should not have contact with reptiles, amphibians, or live poultry because these animals are more likely to make them sick.
- Leave items such as strollers, pacifiers, cups, or toys outside the exhibit.
- Don't let children to put their thumbs, fingers, or objects (like pacifiers) in their mouths when they're around animals or in an animal area.
- Don't let children sit or play on the ground in animal areas.
- Teach children to approach animals with caution and follow the rules. Do not let children put their fingers or objects near an animal's mouth, even if the animal seems friendly. Make sure to follow any rules provided on signs or verbally by the staff.