

HSENI Information Sheet No. 1/11 (Supplement)

Advice to teachers and others who organise visits for children

This supplement advises teachers and others who organise visits by children on the precautions necessary to reduce the risk of ill health arising from contact with animals.

All animals naturally carry a range of micro-organisms, some of which can be transmitted to humans, where they may cause ill health. Some of these, such as the bacterium *Escherichia coli* 0157 (E coli O157) or *Cryptosporidium parvum* (a microscopic parasite), present a serious health hazard and have the potential to cause severe illness and health problems which may be particularly acute in young children.

As with many other educational or recreational activities, visits can never be considered free from all risk. However, while the hazards are real, the risk of infection in children can be readily controlled by simple everyday measures. The following practical steps will help make your visit even more safe, healthy and enjoyable.

Before your visit, you should:

- read and understand the advice in the main **HSENI Information Sheet No.1/11**, and discuss arrangements for the visit with the management at the site;
- consider informing parents / guardians of:
 - the small but potential risk posed to their child from undertaking such a visit, in particular the potential of contracting E. coli 0157 infection;
 - the control measures in place, to reduce the risk of infection; and
 - the appropriate clothing and footwear for such a visit.
- confirm that the control measures provided at the site match the recommendations in HSENI Information Sheet No.1/11;
- seek advice from your Education Board or organisation on what the appropriate ratio of pupils to teachers/leaders/assistants/parents etc. should be; and
- discuss and agree with the supervisors, parents or staff of the school, crèche, leaders of youth organisations etc, their roles and responsibilities during the visit. In particular, they must understand the need to make sure that the children wash, or are helped to wash, their hands thoroughly after contacting animals. Key points to cover with the children should include:
 - explaining the rules for the visit, stressing that they must not eat, drink or chew anything (including sweets) outside the areas in which you permit them to do so;
 - explaining why they must wash their hands thoroughly after contact with the animals, and before eating or drinking anything;
 - demonstrating how to wash their hands properly;
 - discussing the requirements for appropriate clothing, including suitable footwear. You should liaise with the attraction to ascertain what this is; and
 - checking that cuts, grazes etc. on children's hands are covered with a waterproof dressing.



During and after the visit, make sure that the children:

- are reminded of the rules/precautions to take upon arrival at the site;
- do not kiss animals;
- always wash their hands thoroughly before and after eating, after any contact with animals and again before leaving the site;
- eat only food that they have brought with them, or food for human consumption they have bought on the premises, in designated areas, and never eat food which has fallen to the ground, or taste animal foods;
- do not suck fingers or put hands, pens, pencils or crayons etc.. in mouths;
- where practical and possible, clean or change their footwear before leaving; and wash their hands after changing their footwear.

Check that the children stay in their allocated groups during the visit, and that they:

- do not use or pick up tools (e.g. spades and forks) or touch other work equipment unless permitted to do so by site staff;
- do not climb on to walls, fences, gates or animal pens etc;
- listen carefully and follow the instructions and information given by the site staff;
- approach and handle animals quietly and gently;
- do not chase, frighten or torment the animals; and
- do not wander off into unsupervised or prohibited areas e.g. manure heaps.

Remember:

- **the children are your responsibility during the visit;**
- you should supervise them during the visit, especially during hand washing to make sure that each child washes thoroughly. Site staff may be able to help with this supervision; and
- to allow plenty of time before eating or leaving so that the children do not have to rush.

If a member of your group shows signs of illness (e.g. sickness or diarrhoea) after a visit, advise them or their parent/guardian to visit the doctor and explain that they have had recent contact with animals.

