



Welcome to this public health factsheet which provides information on how to avoid 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 may carry a number of infections that can be harmful to people. Common types of illness include infection with *Cryptosporidium parvum*, *E. coli* O157 and *Salmonella*.

Individual cases of illness and outbreaks linked to petting farms have been reported in North Yorkshire.

Avoiding Infection on Farm Visits

Issued April 2017

Facts

- ◆ Cases of *E. coli* O157 linked to farm attractions are at their highest levels between June and October. Very few individual organisms are needed to cause infection. Illness ranges from diarrhoea to kidney failure and in some cases the illness can be fatal.



- ◆ People can become infected by micro-organisms such as *E. coli* O157 or *Cryptosporidium parvum* from consuming contaminated food or drink, through direct contact with contaminated animals, or by contact with an environment contaminated with animal faeces¹.
- ◆ Cases of Cryptosporidiosis are often associated with the lambing season in spring. Disease may cause abdominal pain with 'flu like' symptoms for up to 6 weeks.
- ◆ *Salmonella* can cause diarrhoea, fever and abdominal pains. Occasionally more serious illness will result.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Handrubs or wipes **are not** a substitute for washing your hands with warm running water.

What to do when visiting a farm



- ✗ Don't put hands on faces or fingers in mouths while petting animals or walking round the farm.
- ✗ Don't kiss farm animals or allow children to put their faces close to animals.
- ✗ Don't eat or drink while touching animals or walking round the farm. This includes not eating sweets, crisps or chewing gum.
- ✗ Don't taste or eat any animal foods or unpasteurised produce, such as milk or cheese.
- ✗ 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. Handrubs and wipes do not remove *E. coli* O157 in dirt.



- ✓ Do check that cuts, grazes etc. on children's hands are covered with waterproof dressings.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Do supervise children closely to ensure that they wash their hands thoroughly.
- ✓ Do eat and drink in picnic areas or cafes only.

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 within two weeks after a farm visit contact your GP or call NHS 111 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 the number of human pregnancies affected by contact with an infected animal is extremely small, 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:

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| ◆ 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>

Farm Workers

Farmers have a responsibility to minimise the risks to pregnant women, including members of their family, the public and professional staff visiting farms. 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>

Policy Context/References

1. Preventing or controlling ill health from animal contact at visitor attractions:
Code of Practice V2
Summary of Control Measures
Preventing or controlling ill health from animal contact at visitor attractions: Advice to Teachers and Others who organise visits for children
Access to Farm Partnership, March 2015
www.face-online.org.uk/resources/preventing-or-controlling-ill-health-from-animal-contact-at-visitor-attractions-industry-code-of-practice
2. Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 2002.
HSE, www.hse.gov.uk/nanotechnology/coshh.htm
3. Common Zoonoses in Agriculture.
<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>

Environmental Health Teams

During Office Hours 9.00 am to 5.00 pm Monday to Friday

Local Authority Area	Telephone
City of York Council	01904 551525
Craven District Council	01756 706258
Hambleton District Council	01609 779977 01845 121 1555
Harrogate Borough Council	01423 500600
Richmondshire District Council	01748 829100
Ryedale District Council	01653 600666
Scarborough Borough Council	01723 232514
Selby District Council	01757 705101

Websites

Public Health England

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

Information on infections acquired through animals.



Public Health
England

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

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01904 687100

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Community Infection Prevention and Control, Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust

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Public Health—HAS
North Yorkshire County Council
County Hall | Northallerton | DL7 8DD
www.northyorks.gov.uk/health