

Keeping Your Children Safe at Petting Zoos

The Need-to-Know for Petting Zoos and Farms

Are petting zoos safe for children?

Petting zoos, fairs, and farms can be great opportunities for children to interact with and learn about farm animals. However, farm animals can carry germs that can spread between animals and humans. Some of these germs (bacteria or parasites) live in the intestines of healthy animals and can continue living in the animals' poop. Contact with farm animals like cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, ducks, chickens, turkeys and their environments can pose a risk to human health. Despite the risks, there are many ways to protect your children so they can be safe while learning!



How can people get sick with these germs?

People may get sick from these germs if they come in contact with animals or surfaces contaminated with animal poop and then swallow the germs by eating, drinking, or other activities like thumb-sucking. Young children are more likely to get sick since they are more likely to touch contaminated surfaces and then put their hands in their mouth before hand washing.

What symptoms should you look out for?

The most common symptoms of infections are diarrhea and abdominal pain, but may also include vomiting, fever, cramps, or bloody diarrhea. Many will recover without treatment, but illness can lead to hospitalizations or other severe complications. Infection with Shiga-Toxin Producing E. coli can lead to a condition called Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS). Younger children are at a greater risk for HUS which can cause kidney failure and, very rarely, death.

How can you protect your child?



Make sure your child washes their hands with soap and running water for at least 20 seconds after exiting animal areas, even if they did not touch an animal.



If soap and running water are not available, use hand sanitizer until you can wash your hands.



Wash hands with soap and water before eating, drinking, or chewing gum.



Keep children's items, such as food, drinks, bottles, pacifiers, toys, and strollers, out of animal areas.

Supervise young children during animal interaction and handwashing.



Germs can travel on clothes and infect household members, especially young children, who did not attend a petting zoo. Remove shoes and change into new clothes before or immediately after entering your home to avoid contaminating parts of the home.

