

## Appendix F 2003 DOH-OSPI K-12 Health and Safety Guide Animals in Schools

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide recommendations that will promote health and safety for staff and students when animals are brought into the classroom. Inadequate understanding of animal health and behavior can lead to unnecessary risks for students, staff, and the animals themselves. These guidelines are designed to promote understanding of:

1. Animals that are not safe to bring into schools.
2. Safety precautions to decrease the risk of animals spreading disease to people, particularly young children as they are at higher risk of infection and serious health outcomes.
  - a) Special precautions need to be taken to protect immunocompromised students and staff.
3. Safety precautions for introducing animals into classrooms and other school settings.
  - a) Handling of animals by children under 5 years of age should not be allowed.
  - b) Animals visiting schools should not be handled by anyone besides their handler.
4. How to properly handle animal wastes and other materials to limit the spread of pathogens, such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites.

### I. Animals Which Are UNACCEPTABLE for Schools

- A. Wild Animals.** Wild animals pose a risk for transmitting zoonotic diseases (diseases which can be transferred from animals to people) and, therefore, are not allowed on school grounds. The behavior of wild animals also tends to be unpredictable. Wild mammals pose a risk for transmitting rabies. (WAC 220-450-030)

Exceptions to this recommendation include those instances when wildlife is presented at schools by professionals who have wildlife permits and experience handling them. Because of the high incidence of rabies in bats, raccoons, skunks, and wild carnivores, these animals should not be brought or contained on school grounds under any circumstances (including recently killed animals).

- B. Poisonous Animals.** Venomous and toxin-producing spiders, insects, reptiles (e.g., snakes and lizards), and amphibians (e.g., frogs) should be prohibited from being brought onto school grounds.

Exceptions to this recommendation include those instances when such animals are presented at schools by professionals who have experience handling such animals. Children should not be allowed to have physical contact with venomous or toxin-producing animals.

- C. Wild canine and feline-hybrids.** These animals are crosses between a wild canine (e.g., wolf) or wild feline (e.g., ocelot) and a domestic dog or cat, respectively, and may retain traits of wild animals such as aggression and hunting behaviors, especially toward young children. Therefore, they should not be allowed on school grounds.

- D. Stray Animals.** Stray animals should not be brought onto school grounds because the health and vaccination status of these animals is seldom known.

- E. Live Poultry.** Live poultry, particularly young birds such as chicks and ducklings, are inappropriate in classrooms due to the high risk of *Salmonella* contamination and spread and other bacteria such as *Campylobacter*. Poultry can have these bacteria on their bodies, even when they are healthy and look clean. Live poultry are inappropriate for settings with children less than five years of age. Agricultural education programs with poultry for older students need to follow appropriate health and safety guidelines (See Section O).

- F. Reptiles and Amphibians.** Reptiles such as turtles, lizards, snakes, and amphibians (such as frogs) can have *Salmonella* bacteria on their bodies, even when they are healthy and look clean. The germs also get on the animal's tank and other things the animal touches. *Salmonella* bacteria on a person's hands can spread to other people and surfaces or infect the handler. Reptiles and amphibians are inappropriate for settings with children less than five years of age.

- G. Aggressive Animals.** Animals which are bred or trained to demonstrate aggression toward humans and/or animals, or animals which have demonstrated similar aggression in the past, should not be

permitted on school grounds. Aggressive, unprovoked, or threatening behavior mandates an animal's immediate removal.

Exceptions may be sentry or canine corps dogs for demonstrations that are under the control of trained military or law enforcement officials.

- H. Ferrets.** Ferrets are inappropriate for settings with children less than five years of age because of documented aggressive, unprovoked attacks on young children.

## II. General Guidelines for Animals in Schools

It is important that animals which are brought onto school grounds or into school buildings be clean and healthy to decrease the risk of transmitting diseases to people, although even animals that are clean and healthy can transmit diseases. Children are more susceptible to many zoonotic diseases and parasites than adults, partly due to a lack of hand washing and the tendency of children to put things into their mouths. Therefore, animals that are present in school settings should be healthy-appearing, and vaccinated, and treated for parasites as recommended by a veterinarian to decrease the likelihood of the animal transmitting pathogens to staff or students. Visiting animals should be restricted to an area designated by the principal or administrator. Younger animals should be approved by the principal or administrator before visiting.

- A. Verified Rabies Vaccination.** Evidence of current rabies vaccination is required for all dogs, cats, and ferrets which are brought onto school property for instructional purposes. Dogs and cats under three months of age cannot yet be vaccinated against rabies and should not be handled by children.
- B. Health Certificates for Pets.** A signed statement by a licensed veterinarian is required stating that the pet is in good health, is current on recommended vaccinations and receives regular parasite prevention medication. Additionally, dogs, cats, ferrets, and other animals as applicable, must have had a negative fecal exam for internal parasites within the past six months. An animal should be free of external parasites such as fleas, ticks, and mites. Dogs should be housebroken.

## III. Proper Restraint of Animals

It is important to have an effective way to control all animals as they may react unpredictably to a school setting due to unfamiliarity, noise, commotion, quantity of people, etc. Fear may cause an animal to attempt to escape or act aggressively in situations which are unusual to them. Appropriate restraint devices and methods will allow the handler to react quickly and prevent harm to students or staff and escape of the animal.

- A. Collars and Leashes.** Dogs, cats, and ferrets should have a proper collar, harness, and/or leash as appropriate when on school grounds or in the classroom so that they can be easily controlled. Household rope or string is not considered an appropriate restraint. The owner or person responsible for the animal should stay with the animal during its visit to the school. No animal should be allowed to roam unrestrained on school grounds or in the classroom.
- B. Pet Birds.** Pet birds are not recommended in school. If for some reason they are present, they should never be allowed to fly free in a classroom or be handled by children.
- C. Designated Areas.** All animals should be restricted to the area designated by the principal or administrator. Animals are not recommended in school cafeterias or other eating areas (unless service animals) but may be allowed at times other than during meals if:
1. Effective partitioning or self-closing doors separate the area from food storage or food preparation areas.
  2. Condiments, equipment, and utensils are stored in enclosed cabinets or removed from the area when animals are present.
  3. Dining areas, including tables, countertops, and similar surfaces, are effectively cleaned before the next meal service.
- D. Estrus.** Dogs and cats should be determined not to be in estrus ("heat") at the time of the visit.

- E. Owl Pellets.** Always obtain owl pellets for dissection from reliable supply sources that sterilize them. After dissection, children need to thoroughly wash their hands with warm water and soap, and surfaces used for dissection must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.
- F. Animal Dissection.** Always obtain animals and animal parts for dissection from reliable supply sources. Specimens should not be preserved in formaldehyde. Animals found dead are not appropriate for classroom display or dissection. If a dead animal is brought to school, report it to your local health jurisdiction immediately and do not allow anyone else to touch it.
- G. Taxidermy.** Preserved/stuffed animals are not to be handled by students. They are preserved with toxics including arsenic and mercury. They are also potential allergens. [Conserve O Gram Volume 2 Issue 3: Arsenic Health and Safety Update \(nps.gov\)](#)

#### IV. Special Conditions for Specific Animals

Specific recommendations should be observed for the following animals because of zoonotic diseases that they can carry or because of certain tendencies:

- A. Parrots, Parakeets, Budgies, and Cockatiels.** Because these birds can transmit psittacosis to people, and have the potential for biting, feather dander, and aerosolization of feather parts and waste, they are not recommended in schools. They should not be handled by children. Birds showing any signs of illness should not be brought to the school. Birds brought to school as temporary visitors need to have clean cages and their wastes contained. Birds permanently housed on school property in cages need to be evaluated by a qualified avian veterinarian prior to being housed on school grounds; this evaluation should include PCR testing for psittacosis and prophylactic treatment if recommended.
- B. Ferrets.** Ferrets with rabies vaccination and a health evaluation by a veterinarian can be allowed to visit school settings in which there are no children less than 5 years of age, but they must be handled by the person responsible for them. Children should not be allowed to hold ferrets due to the animal's propensity to bite when startled.
- C. Reptiles and Amphibians.** Because all reptiles and amphibians can carry *Salmonella*, special precautions should be instituted when school children handle them. Reptiles and amphibians should not be present in school settings in which there are children less than 5 years of age. (No turtles with a carapace length less than four inches are allowed in schools. They are banned for sale or trade.) Immediately after handling a reptile, amphibian, their equipment, or anything in their environment, students should be supervised in washing their hands thoroughly with soap and warm water.
- D. Fish.** Disposable gloves should be worn when cleaning aquariums. Used tank water should be disposed of in sinks that are not used for food preparation or for obtaining water for human consumption. A custodial sink is preferred.
- E. Guide, Hearing, and other Service Dogs and Law Enforcement Animals.** These animals should not be prohibited from being on school grounds or in classroom situations. This assumes they are appropriately trained, vaccinated, have past health exams, are well-behaved, and not aggressive.

#### V. Student Interaction with Animals

Any animal may react aggressively in unfamiliar situations; therefore, student interaction with animals should always be supervised and regulated by a few basic rules.

- A.** Because increased activity and sudden movements can make animals feel threatened, all student interaction with animals should be highly organized and supervised. Students should be kept in small groups, and rough play or teasing of animals should be avoided to decrease the risk of animal bites.
- B.** It is recommended that children are not allowed to feed pets directly from their hands.
- C.** Small animals, such as guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils, mice, and baby poultry such as chicks or ducklings, should be handled with leather gloves whenever possible. Rabbits do not like to be held and will struggle to free themselves which can cause injury to the rabbit.

- D. Children should be prohibited from "kissing" or cuddling animals or having them in close contact with their faces.
- E. Education with animals should be used to reemphasize proper hygiene and hand washing recommendations. All children who handle animals, their food, or their habitat should be supervised in washing their hands immediately after with soap and warm water.
- F. Animals or their supplies should not be allowed in the vicinity of sinks where children wash their hands; in any area where food is prepared, stored, or served; or in areas used for the cleaning or storage of food utensils or dishes. Animals should also be restricted from nursing stations or sterile and clean supply rooms. Do not allow any animals in sand boxes where children play.
- G. Immunocompromised students may be especially susceptible to zoonotic diseases; therefore, special precautions may be needed to minimize the risk of disease transmission to these students. Consultation with the child's parents about precautionary measures is strongly advised.

#### VI. **Cage Cleaning and Handling/Disposal of Animal Wastes While on School Campuses**

- A. **Clean Up of Cages, Aquariums and Animal Wastes.** Children should not be allowed to handle or clean up any form of animal waste (feces, urine, blood, soiled bedding, etc.). Disposable gloves should be worn when cleaning cages and aquariums. Animal wastes should be disposed of in a way to prevent children contacting them, such as in a sealed, plastic bag placed in a trash container with a lid or via the sewage system for feces and aquarium water. Cages and aquariums should be cleaned in sinks that are not used for food preparation or for obtaining water for human consumption. A custodial sink is preferred. Food handlers should not be involved in the cleanup of animal waste.
- B. **Prohibited Areas.** Animal waste should not be disposed of, and visiting animals should not be allowed to defecate in or near areas where children routinely play or congregate (e.g., sandboxes, school playgrounds, etc.).
- C. **Litter Boxes.** Litter boxes for visiting animals should not be allowed in classrooms.

Sources: *Alabama State Department of Public Health*  
*Washington State Department of Health*  
*Washington State Department of Agriculture*  
*NASPHV Animals in Public Settings Compendium*