



News Release

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Fairs and petting zoos are in season: tips to avoid animal-spread illnesses

OLYMPIA — Millions of people go to agricultural fairs and petting zoos this time of year, and children of all ages love to be around the animals. Taking a few safety precautions can help reduce the chance of getting sick after spending time with animals or their surroundings.

“We encourage people to enjoy their local fairs and petting zoos,” said State Health Officer Dr. Kathy Lofy. “Just make sure your visit is a safe one. Washing your hands is the number one way to do just that.”

Handwashing is the most effective way to reduce chances of getting sick. The spread of illnesses from animals, such as those caused by *E.coli* and *Salmonella*, are commonly linked to hand-to-mouth contact. Young children and the elderly are more likely to experience serious illness. People with weakened immune systems, including pregnant women, are also at risk for serious illness. Yet anyone can get sick, so everyone should wash their hands with soap and water right after leaving the animal areas. Adults should supervise young children to make sure they don't put their hands in their mouths and ensure that their hands are washed thoroughly.

A recent *E. coli* illness outbreak in Washington was linked to an educational agricultural event held in an animal barn. The outbreak sickened more than 50 people, mostly children, with 11 requiring hospitalization.

Even healthy animals can carry germs that make people sick. These germs can live for months in animal bedding, flooring, pens, soil, clothing, shoes and other things that they touch if the surfaces are not appropriately cleaned. An animal's fur, skin, and saliva can also carry germs that can then be passed to people. To reduce your chances of illness, never eat or drink in animal areas. Leave items that can become contaminated, such as toys, strollers, bottles, or pacifiers outside of these areas.

Petting zoo safety

August 12, 2015

Page 2

[Long-standing recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and rules adopted in Washington require fairs and other places that exhibit animals to take specific steps to reduce illness risks. These include providing sufficient handwashing facilities, discouraging activities like eating and drinking in animal areas, and putting up signs warning people about the risks of illness from animal germs.

By following these simple steps you can enjoy animals and help prevent illness from contact with animal germs.

The [Department of Health website](http://www.doh.wa.gov) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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