

Guidance for handling and keeping of Animals in schools

LEGISLATION

Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
Animal Welfare Act 2006

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This guidance details the basic health and safety issues associated with handling and keeping animals in schools.

Further guidance is provided in CLEAPSS guidance documents L56 Housing and Keeping Animals and the Laboratory Handbook.

2.0 HANDLING ANIMALS

2.1 If animals are handled, the most important issue is the maintenance of good hygiene.

When handling animals:

- do not consume food or drink,
- cover any open cuts or abrasions on the exposed skin of hands and arms with waterproof adhesive dressings,
- wash your hands with soap and water before and directly after handling animals,
- keep animals away from the face.

2.2 Careful handling of small mammals and other animals is most important; the animals should be restrained sufficiently so that they cannot damage themselves or the handler.

2.3 Mammals should be handled daily if possible (unless breeding or nursing when they should be disturbed as little as possible). In this way they will normally become quite tame and accustomed to being handled.

2.4 Gloves should not normally be worn unless it is known that an animal for one reason or another is likely to bite or scratch. In this situation a pair of disposable gloves which does not particularly reduce dexterity, is a sensible precaution.

2.5 Handling small animals should always be carried out over a table or trough filled with a soft material such as sand / sawdust.

2.6 Physical injuries

2.6.1 There is always the danger of bites and scratches, and teachers or technicians should check that any animals kept / brought in are docile, friendly and gentle in the presence of children.

2.6.2 Small fingers poked towards the mouths of normally non-aggressive animals may be interpreted as an offering of food and obligingly bitten.

2.7 Diseases, parasites and allergies

2.7.1 The likelihood of diseases being passed on from pet animals is low. However, allergic reactions to mammals, birds and a few other animals cannot be discounted. These might result from handling the animals or just from being near them and be detected by the development of skin rashes, irritation to the eyes and nose or breathing difficulties.

2.7.2 Hand washing soon after handling animals will help. Teachers should watch for the development of allergic reactions in pupils who come into contact with the animals.

2.7.3 Children known to have allergic reactions to specific animals must, of course, have restricted access to those that may trigger a response. In most cases, an allergic reaction will subside once the animal and the affected person are kept apart; in extreme cases, seek medical advice.

2.7.4 Salmonella bacteria may be carried by reptiles; good hygiene is again required, especially if aquatic reptiles, such as terrapins, are kept. Good general hygiene and hand washing are essential for risk reduction. Children under five should not have contact with such reptiles or the environment in which the reptiles live or exercise.

2.7.5 Animals may carry an infection (such as E-coli, Salmonella etc.) even when they appear clean and healthy. Often the bacteria will be in the animal's droppings and may be on the animal's body or the surface of the cage/their environment. Touching the animal or surfaces can lead to infection as the bacteria may be picked up on the hands and then accidentally passed into the mouth. Thorough handwashing immediately after contact with animals is therefore important. Hand gels or wipes are **not** a substitute for washing your hands with running water.

3.0 BRINGING PETS AND OTHER ANIMALS INTO SCHOOL

3.1 In addition to the general guidance given above it is important that suitable arrangements are made in advance for the well-being of animals for the short time they are to be on the premises

3.2 When a variety of animals will be together, consider carefully the possibility of unwanted interactions. Animals must be housed appropriately and separately whilst on the premises, any containers used to transport them must be appropriate and retain the animal securely.

4.0 ANIMAL SUPPLIERS

4.1 The majority of animals available through reputable suppliers present no hazards that good hygiene procedures cannot address.

- 4.2 In order for there to be minimal risk to humans of diseases being transmitted from animals kept in schools, it is important that animals are obtained from accredited or high-quality sources.
Unless these are known to have originated from a reliable source, it will not be possible to be confident that they are disease-free.

5.0 ANIMAL HEALTH

- 5.1 If animals are not kept in clean conditions, or come into contact with other animals from dubious sources, it will no longer be possible to guarantee that the animals will remain in a disease-free condition.

- 5.2 Holiday times, particularly in primary schools, can obviously create real difficulties.

It is preferable that the animals remain at school and suitable arrangements made for their normal feeding, watering and cleaning. If, however, this is impossible and animals have to be taken out of school at holidays, they should not be sent home with pupils or other people unless all of the following considerations can be satisfied:

- It can be guaranteed that the animals will be looked after as well as usual.
- Whoever is caring for the animals must have all the necessary information, equipment, food, skills, etc.
- Parents must have been informed and given their consent.
- Steps will be taken to ensure that the school's animals will not be able to come into contact with pet animals (cats, dogs, rodents or other mammals).
- That small mammals cannot come into contact with wild rodents (mice, rats, etc.) while off the school premises.

6.0 CLEANING AND HYGIENE

- 6.1 This is clearly important, both for the health of the animals and for those people looking after them. Hands should be washed *before* and, of course, after cleaning cages, tanks etc. Disposable gloves should preferably be worn.

- 6.2 After removing soiled litter material, cages should be scrubbed with hot water and liquid detergent.

- 6.3 Frequency of cleaning (Small Mammals)

- 6.3.1 Gerbils produce very little urine and so require relatively infrequent changes. Hamsters produce a little more urine; mice, rats, guinea pigs and rabbits urinate in relatively large amounts. These animals should be cleaned at least twice a week. Your nose is always a good guide - cages which are even slightly offensive should already have been cleaned! Arrangements must be made for cages to be cleaned as regularly as normal at holiday times.

7.0 SOILED LITTER DISPOSAL

7.1 Soiled litter should ideally be incinerated; more conveniently it could be sealed in strong plastic bags and placed with other waste in dustbins.

8.0 UNSUITABLE ANIMALS

8.1 It goes without saying that certain animals present unacceptable risks and should not be brought into schools.

8.2 Wild birds and mammals taken, even if legally, from the 'wild' should not be brought into schools directly as they may be harbouring diseases or parasites transmissible to humans.

For more information and advice, contact the Health and Safety Team or the Animal Welfare Officer at healthandsafetyteam@oldham.gov.uk

Record of document review and amendments

Keeping animals Guidance			
Version	Date	Amended By	Comments
1	September 2015	-	Created. L.Smith
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