



Animals and Illness

Animals can provide people with comfort and enjoyment. They can be excellent companions and provide children with opportunities for learning about nature, responsibility, and empathy. There are, however, potential health concerns related to common child care pets. Providers and parents need to be made aware of these risks in order to make appropriate decisions about allowing pets in child care.

Animals have their own personalities and temperaments. A child care provider must ensure that any animal brought into a child care is friendly and calm around children.

It is also important that animal housing and animal environments are kept clean. Animal waste can carry diseases even when animals appear healthy. Waste should be removed regularly.

Cleaning of cages, food dishes, etc. must be done away from child areas or food preparation areas. Cages and aquariums need to be washed in a utility sink.



Ensure that children wash hands thoroughly after handling any animal or being in an animal's environment. Adults also need to remember to wash their own hands as well after handling or caring for the animal.

For more information see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website. This website has more information on health risks associated with different animals. The site is:

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/>

You can get additional information on any of the illnesses or conditions listed in this brochure from the CDC website or by calling the Child Care Health Outreach Program and speaking to an environmental health specialist at **425.252.5415**. You can find model pet policies for resident or visiting animals on our website www.snohd.org/



PUBLIC HEALTH
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Health Risks

Health Risks From Animals



**SNOHOMISH
COUNTY** 
HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Dogs

Dogs with predictable temperaments make excellent pets. Dogs need to be up to date on their vaccinations including rabies. Feed dogs commercial dog food. Never feed them raw meat. They also need to have a space outside to relieve themselves that is away from children's play areas. Dog waste needs to be picked up daily. Health risks include:

- **Allergies**
- **Biting**
- **Diarrheal illnesses** (Campylobacter, Salmonella, Cryptosporidia, Giardia)
- **Fleas and ticks**
- **Leptospirosis**
- **Rabies**
- **Hookworm and roundworm**



Cats

Make sure that cat food and litter boxes are kept inaccessible to children. Keep cats off counters or tables where food is prepared or served. Always wash hands after coming into contact with cats or their feces. Keep outdoor sandboxes covered. Wash scratches or bites immediately with soap and water. Vaccinate cats against rabies. Health risks associated with cats include:

- **Allergies**
- **Biting or scratching**
- **Cat-Scratch Fever**
- **Diarrheal illnesses** (Campylobacter, Cryptosporidia, Salmonella)
- **Fleas and ticks**
- **Leptospirosis**
- **Rabies**
- **Toxoplasmosis**
- **Ringworm**



Birds

Carefully watch birds that have recently been in pet shops or aviaries. The area around the bird cage needs to be vacuumed or swept regularly to keep it free from feathers, seed hulls, and dander. Baby chicks or ducklings should not be kept indoors due to the risks of Salmonella. Health risks associated with birds include:

- **Allergies**
- **Biting** (large birds such as parrots)
- **Psittacosis** (usually indoor pet birds of the parrot family)
- **Salmonella** (all birds especially ducklings and chicks)



Small Mammals (pocket pets)

Animals such as mice, hamsters, gerbils, rats, guinea pigs, and rabbits, are often kept in as pets. Health risks associated with these small mammals include:

- **Allergies**
- **Biting or scratching**
- **Leptospirosis**
- **Lymphocytic**
- **Choriomeningitis Virus** (mice, hamsters, guinea pigs)
- **Pasteurella** (rabbits)
- **Rat bite fever**
- **Salmonella** (rodents)
- **Tularemia** (rodents, rabbits)



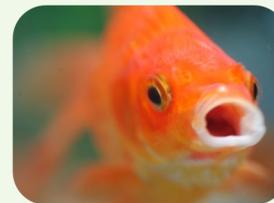
Reptiles and Amphibians

The primary health risk associated with reptiles (snakes, turtles, and lizards) and amphibians (frogs and salamanders) is **salmonella**. It is estimated that 70,000 people in the United States get salmonella from reptiles each year. Antibiotics do not rid animals of salmonella. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) strongly recommends that homes and child cares with children under the age of 5 years old not keep reptiles. Older children should be required to wash their hands thoroughly after contacting reptile pets or their cages. Aquatic frogs have also been associated with cases of Salmonella.



Fish

Fish are generally a safe choice for a pet. Children should never touch fish or aquarium water. Keep tanks clean and make sure cleaning occurs away from child spaces and food preparation areas. Always wash hands after cleaning or caring for fish. A health risk associated with fish is **mycobacterial infection**, a bacteria found in aquarium water that can infect cuts and scratches in humans. Salmonella can also be found in aquarium water.



Farm Animals

Farm animals such as cows, goats, horses, sheep, and pigs, can spread many different illnesses to people. For young children some of these illnesses can cause life-threatening illness or lifelong complications. Young animals have an even greater chance of spreading bacterial illnesses than adult animals. Due to their large size, farm animals also pose a physical hazard to children by stepping on them or biting. Hazards include:

- **Allergies**
- **Biting or physical injury**
- **Brucellosis**
- **Diarrheal illnesses** (Campylobacter, E. coli O157:H7, Salmonella, Cryptosporidia, Yersinia enterocolitica)
- **Leptospirosis**
- **Q-Fever**
- **Rabies**
- **Ringworm**



Wild and Exotic Animals

Wild (e.g. bats, raccoon, squirrel, beavers) and exotic (e.g. monkeys, hedgehogs, wallabies, sugar gliders) animals and animals bred to wildlife (e.g. wolf hybrids) are not recommended pets. In most places it is illegal to keep a wild animal as a pet. If you have a bat house, be aware that bats can carry rabies. Wild animals can carry many illnesses including:

- **Hantavirus** (mice)
- **Plague** (rodents, prairie dogs)
- **Rabies** (bats, raccoons, skunks)
- **And many other illnesses.**