

Protecting Guests from E.coli

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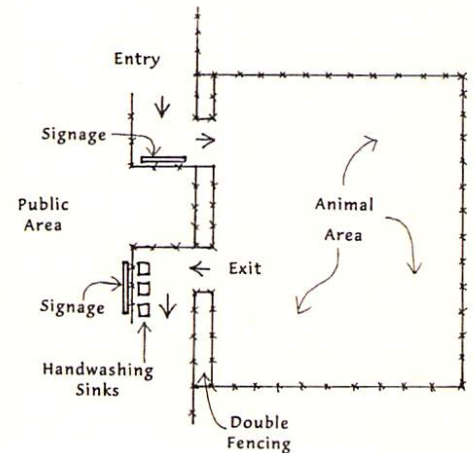
Farm animals that children can feed, pet and groom are important agritainment attractions. Unfortunately, animals can pose serious risks because they can carry a dangerous bacterium known as E. coli O157:H7 (E. coli O157). Since 2000, our company has identified 47 different E. coli O157 outbreaks at petting zoos affecting 957 people, mostly children, including several child deaths.

E. coli O157 causes human illness by destroying the intestinal wall. Approximately 8% of infections develop into a life-threatening disease. Children under age 5 are especially susceptible to both E. coli O157 and development of HUS. Of children affected with HUS, 3-5% will die and up to 30% will have lifelong medical problems.

It only takes as few as 10 germs of E. coli O157 to cause illness. The highest probability of being infected is from exposure to ruminants, such as cattle, sheep, goats or deer and anything contaminated by their manure, including other animals. E. coli O157 can survive for long periods in animal bedding, manure dust, soil or on the hides of animals. Anything that comes into contact with manure can be contaminated, including ponds, lakes, streams and ground water by field runoff.

Transmission of E. Coli 157 can occur when persons pet, touch or are licked by animals and then put their fingers in their mouth or touch food they eat.

Following the below recommendations can significantly reduce the risk of E. coli O157 illness:



1. Keep Animal areas completely separate, fenced and gated from all other areas, including double-fencing where guests could touch animals from outside the animal area.
2. Include signage at the entry area about the risk of contact with animals. Information should tell parents how to minimize risk to their children, including not allowing children to put their fingers in their mouth. Food, beverages, smoking, toys, strollers, pacifiers, spill-proof (sippy) cups or baby bottles should not be permitted in animal areas.
3. The single most important preventative measure for guests is handwashing after being in an animal area. Provide handwashing sinks (including ones low enough for children) with running water, liquid soap dispensers and disposable paper towel dispensers at the exit area. Hand sanitizers are not considered an acceptable alternative to handwashing. Signage should instruct guests to wash their hands and assist their children with handwashing. Handwashing stations should be positioned straight out of the exit gate so they can't be missed.

4. If animal feeding is permitted, only allow animal food sold at the farm & avoid ice cream cones kids could eat.
5. ADA guidelines require that wheelchairs and other mobility assistance devices cannot be restricted from animal areas. Staff should assist people using such devices in sanitizing any parts of the devices that come in contact with animals or the ground upon exiting the animal area.
6. Animal areas should be supervised by trained staff to ensure all guests are following safe practices.
7. Manure should be removed frequently to minimize manure dust.
8. Food and beverage areas should be separate, distant and uphill (to prevent contamination by groundwater runoff) from animal areas and provide additional handwashing facilities.
9. These standards should also be followed for pony ride areas.
10. Farm ponds animals can access should not be accessible to the public.

With a properly designed facility and well-trained staff, children can enjoy the opportunity to safely interact with farm animals.