



Community Infection Prevention and Control Policy for Care Home settings

Animals in a care home setting

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ANIMALS IN A CARE HOME SETTING

1. Introduction

The presence of pets or visiting animals is widely accepted as a useful way to enhance the quality of life for residents. However, disease can be acquired through contact with animals, especially if a person's immunity is reduced through age, illness or therapy.

Infections associated with animals

Animal	Disease
Dogs and cats	Salmonella
	Campylobacter
	Toxocara
	Toxoplasma
Birds	Chlamydia psittaci
Terrapins	Salmonella
Exotic pets, e.g. snakes, lizards, iguanas	Salmonella
Tropical fish	Salmonella
	Streptococcus iniae
	Aeromonas
	Mycobacterium marinum
Ponies, horses, donkeys	Salmonella
	Ringworm

Taking sensible precautions will reduce the risk to an acceptable level.

The care home manager should ensure a knowledgeable person is responsible for the animal.

There should be a written agreement in the home, to ensure full understanding of the:

- Types of animals allowed for Pet Therapy visits - only mature, house trained animals should be allowed
- Control and permitted behaviour of pets whilst in the home
- Routes of entry, exit and passage for the pet in the home
- Areas that pets are not allowed, i.e. food storage, preparation, cooking or serving areas
- Insurance liability of owners and handlers

2. Exotic and tropical pets

Examples include exotic birds, tropical fish, insects and reptiles. Many of these animals require very specialist care that is different to caring for common domestic pets. They can suffer from stress and this damages their immune system, which increases the risk of

transmitting opportunistic infections to humans. These exotic pets are not recommended for purchase within care home premises.

Fish tanks

Fish tanks can pose an infection hazard and need stringent management if purchased.

- Tanks should not be sited nor cleaned in areas where immunocompromised residents are cared for.
- Tanks must be kept sealed and located in a dayroom or reception area.
- Ensure any cuts or wounds on hands are covered with a waterproof dressing and gloves are worn prior to touching the fish or aquarium water.
- Wash hands with liquid soap, warm running water and dry with paper towels, before and after handling fish or cleaning aquariums.
- If liquid soap and warm running water are not readily available, use alcohol handrub.
- Residents and visitors must not have direct access to the water as it will be heavily contaminated with microorganisms, such as bacteria and viruses.
- Fish food is also frequently contaminated with pathogenic microorganisms, such as Salmonella, therefore, hands must be washed thoroughly after handling fish food.
- A maintenance contract with an aquarium maintenance specialist must be established.

3. Choice of animal

The following factors require consideration for the long-term commitment of owning any animal:

- Which member(s) of staff will hold responsibility for the animal?
- What is the resident's preference?
- Is the animal suitable for the environment and its restrictions?
- Are there any staff/residents with allergies or objections?
- Feeding arrangements
- Grooming arrangements
- Can the animal be kept out of kitchen/food areas?
- Veterinary arrangements
- Cleaning/disposal of excrement arrangements
- Equipment – purchase and cleaning

4. Animal care

- All animals must be screened by a veterinary practitioner prior to being introduced to the premises. Only introduce pets to residents after the pet has been adequately

deflead, wormed and vaccinated.

- Animal vaccinations must be up-to-date.
- Animals should be regularly wormed.
- Animals should have their coats brushed and cleaned regularly.
- Flea treatment should be used on both the animal and its environment as necessary.
- Animals must be checked yearly by a veterinary practitioner.
- Person responsible must ensure records of the pet worm and flea treatments, along with vaccinations and veterinary care are kept up-to-date.

5. Food and feeding

- Hygienic practices must be observed at all times, e.g. handwashing.
- Fresh water should be available at all times.
- Feeding areas should be kept clean and pest free.
- Pet food should be stored in a designated area (not in the refrigerator with resident's/staff member's food).
- Commercial pet foods are preferable.
- Once opened, moist food should be used the same day.
- Moist food should be removed after 4 hours if not eaten.
- Feeding dishes and containers must be washed after each feed.
- Dried pet food must be clearly labelled.
- Animals should not be fed in the kitchen.

6. Waste and litter

- Do not store the litter tray near food storage, preparation or eating areas.
- Litter trays and cages should be lined for easy cleaning.
- Always wear disposable apron and gloves and when cleaning and emptying litter trays or cages and handling animal faeces.
- Litter should be changed daily.
- Litter trays should be cleaned and disinfected weekly or before if visibly soiled.
- Take care when disposing of animal faeces. Use a 'poop scoop' and dispose of contents into a disposable bag and place into a designated bin or into the general waste system.
- When the task is completed, dispose of gloves and apron and wash hands.

Pregnant women should not undertake any of the tasks listed above because of the risk of

toxoplasmosis.

7. Staff care

- All staff should be aware of the hygiene considerations following the handling of animals, cleaning, feeding and/or other equipment.
- Skin lesions/cuts/abrasions should be adequately covered.
- Hands must be washed thoroughly after feeding/handling animals.
- Food must not be shared with the animals.

8. Visiting animals

Various organisations work throughout the UK who arrange to bring pets into hospitals and other health and social care premises for the benefit of the clients, e.g. 'Pets as therapy' (PAT). All volunteers must ensure that the pets used are registered with the appropriate scheme.

The animals used are usually dogs and the following guidance should apply:

- The dog must be an adult
- Must be house trained
- Regularly dewormed
- Regularly treated for fleas
- Fully vaccinated
- Visits should not take place if the dog is unwell
- Animals must be kept away from other residents with phobias or allergies
- If the dog is putting their paws on a bed, place a protective pad, e.g. incontinence pad, under their paws and discard it after use. Do not use the pad for more than one bed

Assistance dogs

The Equality Act 2010 says that reasonable adjustments must be made in order to avoid discriminating against people with disabilities. These include waiving a 'no dog policy' in order that a disabled person may be accompanied by their Recognised Assistance Dog.

All Recognised Assistance Dog owners carry a card advising that assistance dogs should not be a risk to health and hygiene. It is a requirement that all Recognised Assistance Dogs must be regularly deflead, wormed and vaccinated in accordance with the latest veterinary advice and also receive regular health assessments by vets.

The assistance dog is the responsibility of its user with regard to keeping it under control, discipline, toileting, exercising, provision of water, coping with the dog's sudden illness, etc. This responsibility is promoted by the assistance dog charities and forms part of the user's training.

In the unlikely event that it is necessary for the dog's excreta to be cleared up by staff,

refer to the above Section 6 Waste and litter.

In extreme cases, or if the occurrence happens more than once during the visit, the user should be asked to remove the dog from the premises.

Assistance dogs are working animals, not pets, and through training recognise when they are 'on duty'. Distraction may jeopardise the safety of the user, therefore, it is important that assistance dogs are not petted or distracted without the user's permission. Always ask the dog user whether you can talk to or pet the dog and do not be offended if the answer is no.

9. General precautions

- Animals should not be permitted to lick residents or staff.
- After touching animals, staff and residents should wash their hands thoroughly. Alcohol handrub or skin wipes should be offered to residents that are unable to access handwashing facilities.
- Cleaning schedules and records should include all aspects of the pet's eating, drinking and accommodation, e.g. bowls, bottles, bedding, bed, cage, hutch, aquarium, fishbowl, etc.
- Keep bedding and feeding equipment scrupulously clean (machine washable bedding is advised).
- Wash feeding or other equipment separate from staff or residents' utensils/equipment in warm soapy water.
- Seek advice immediately if the animal is unwell.

10. Bites/scratches

- Animal claws should be trimmed to reduce the risk of scratches. If a bite or scratch from an animal occurs, it should be washed with liquid soap and warm running water, dried with paper towels, and covered with a waterproof dressing and the injury reported immediately.
- Seek medical attention if necessary. Antibiotics and tetanus vaccination may be indicated for flesh penetrating wounds.
- Animal bites can occasionally cause serious infections, particularly in immunosuppressed persons.

11. Deceased animals

Make all arrangements with the veterinary practitioner who is responsible and he/she will advise the correct course of action.

12. Feral animals

This refers to animals that are not domesticated and live in the wild. Common examples include wild cats, squirrels and foxes.

They should not be fed or attracted to care homes as they can become a nuisance or risk to health.

Care must be exercised when dealing with any stray or wild animal, as they may have contracted disease from another wild animal.

13. Farm visits

Farm visits can be fun and also a useful aid to stimulation, but sensible precautions are recommended and include the following:

- Wash and dry hands thoroughly after touching animals
- Pregnant women should avoid contact with sheep during the lambing season and for 6 weeks after it has finished
- Do not eat or drink while going around the farm. Eat and drink only in designated areas and clean hands before eating or drinking
- Do not put your face against the animal
- Do not put your hands in your mouth after touching the animal
- Do not touch any animal droppings
- Clean shoes and wheels, e.g. wheelchair, walking frame, when leaving the farm and wash hands thoroughly

14. Infection Prevention and Control resources, education and training

See Appendix 1 for the 'Animals in a care home setting: Quick reference guide'.

The Community Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Team have produced a wide range of innovative educational and IPC resources designed to assist your Care Home in achieving compliance with the *Health and Social Care Act 2008: code of practice on the prevention and control of infections and related resources* and CQC registration requirements.

These resources are either free to download from the website or available at a minimal cost covering administration and printing:

- 30 IPC Policy documents for Care Home settings
- Preventing Infection Workbook: Guidance for Care Homes

- IPC CQC inspection preparation Pack for Care Homes
- IPC audit tools, posters, leaflets and factsheets
- IPC Bulletin for Care Homes

In addition, we hold IPC educational training events in North Yorkshire.

Further information on these high quality evidence-based resources is available at www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk.

15. References

Assistance Dogs UK www.assisteddogs.org.uk/

Department of Health and Social Care (Updated December 2022) *Health and Social Care Act 2008: code of practice on the prevention and control of infections and related guidance*

Department of Health and Health Protection Agency (2013) *Prevention and control of infection in care homes – an information resource*

Equality Act, The (2010) www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents

Health Protection Scotland (2019) *Animals in care settings: infection prevention and control guidelines* www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/web-resources-container/animals-in-care-settings-infection-prevention-and-control-guidelines/

Royal College of Nursing (2019) *Working with Dogs in Health Care Settings: A protocol to support organisations considering working with dogs in health care settings and allied health environments*

16. Appendices

Appendix 1: Animals in a care home setting: Quick reference guide



Animals in a care home setting: Quick reference guide



Risk reduction

It is widely accepted that pets or visiting animals can enhance the quality of life for many residents. Unfortunately, there are many serious infections associated with pets and animals, e.g. cats with *Campylobacter*, birds with *Chlamydia psittaci*, tropical fish with *Salmonella*. This 'Quick reference guide' aims to reduce the risk of animal associated infection.

Care home responsibilities

- Produce detailed guidance covering:
 - ◊ Types of animals allowed to visit
 - ◊ Control whilst in the home
 - ◊ Routes of pet entry, exit and passage
 - ◊ Insurance liability of owners/handlers
- Consider any staff or residents with allergies.

Fish tank/aquarium care

- Do not place or clean tanks in areas used by immunocompromised residents.
- Keep tanks sealed.
- Cover cuts or wounds on hands with a waterproof dressing.
- Wash hands with liquid soap and warm running water before and after handling food, fish or cleaning an aquarium.
- Establish an aquarium maintenance contract.

Resident pet care considerations

- Which staff are responsible?
- Arrangements for:
 - ◊ Feeding - fresh water; store food in designated area; removal of uneaten food; cleaning of food and water containers; labelling of food; do not share human food with pets
 - ◊ Grooming - regular brushing and cleaning
 - ◊ Keeping to designated areas - no access to kitchen or food serving areas
 - ◊ Veterinary input - regular vaccinations; worm and flea prevention
 - ◊ Cleaning/disposal of excrement - keep away from food storage/preparation/eating areas; use of liners for litter trays/cages; use of aprons and gloves; change litter daily and clean trays weekly and when soiled; hand washing is paramount
- Equipment - purchase and cleaning:
 - ◊ Ensure easy to clean
 - ◊ Establish cleaning schedule

Additional IPC measures

- Do not allow animals to lick residents or staff.
- Always handwash or use handrub or wipes after contact.
- Clean bites/scratches immediately and if necessary, seek medical advice.
- Cleaning schedules and records should record all aspects of animal care.

Visiting animals

- 'Pets as therapy' or similar should have appropriate registration with the organisation they represent.
- Must be adult, house trained, vaccinated, dewormed and defleaed.

For further information, please refer to the full Policy which can be found at

www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk/care-homes/policies/