Avoiding ill health at open farms – advice to teachers from the HSE

This supplement to AIS23 *Avoiding ill health at open farms – Advice to farmers* advises teachers and others who organise visits for children to farms on controlling the risk of infections from the animals the children may contact during their visit.

All animals naturally carry a range of micro-organisms, some of which can be transmitted to humans, where they may cause ill health. Some infections which may be contracted on farms, such as the bacterium *Escherichia coli* O157 (*Ecoli* O157 and also more recently *Ecoli* O26), present a serious hazard and potentially cause severe disease which may be particularly acute in young children.

While the hazard from infection resulting from a farm visit is real, the risks are readily controlled by everyday measures. The following sensible steps will help make your visit even more safe, healthy and enjoyable.

Before your visit:

- read and understand the advice in the main AIS23 information sheet, and discuss visit arrangements with the farm management. Assure yourself that the facilities provided match the recommendations in AIS23;
- complete a risk assessment which will help you to decide the appropriate level of adult supervision for the group. Staffing ratios for visits are difficult to prescribe as a range of factors need to be taken into account including the age, ability and characteristics of the group, the mode of travel, the nature of the activities planned, and the experience of the teachers and other adults in off-site supervision. In addition to the teacher in charge, there should be enough supervisors to cope with an emergency. Further advice may be obtained from your local education authority or the Department for Children, Schools and Families (www.lotc.org.uk);
- discuss with the supervisors, who may be parents or staff of the school, creche etc, their role during the visit. They must understand the need to make sure that the children wash, or are helped to wash, their hands thoroughly after contacting animals, and follow the other rules suggested below;
- discuss with pupils the rules for the visit, stressing that they must not eat or chew outside the areas in which you permit them to do so;
- make sure that pupils wear appropriate clothing, including sturdy outdoor shoes (not sandals) or wellington boots if possible;
- check that cuts, grazes etc on children's hands are covered with a waterproof dressing.

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During and after the visit, make sure that the children:

- do not kiss animals;
- always wash their hands thoroughly before and after eating, after any contact with animals and again before leaving the farm;
- eat only food that they have brought with them, or food for human consumption they have bought on the farm, in designated areas, and never eat food which has fallen to the ground, or taste animal foods;
- do not suck fingers or put hands, pens, pencils or crayons etc in mouths;
- • clean or change their footwear before leaving, remembering to wash their hands after any contact with animal faeces on their footwear. Check that the children stay in their allocated groups during the visit, and that they:

- do not use or pick up tools (eg spades and forks) unless permitted to do so by farm staff;
- do not climb on to walls or animal pens etc;
- listen carefully and follow the instructions and information given by the farm staff;
- approach and handle animals quietly and gently;
- • do not chase, frighten or torment the animals. Remember:

- the children are your responsibility during the visit;
- you should supervise them during the visit, especially during hand washing to make sure that each child washes and dries their hands thoroughly. Farm staff may be able to help with this supervision;
- allow plenty of time before eating or leaving so that the children do not have to rush.

If a member of your group shows signs of illness (eg sickness or diarrhoea) after a visit, advise them or their parent/guardian to visit the doctor and explain that they have had recent contact with animals.

Further information

Extra copies of this information sheet and supplement are available free from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA. Tel: 01787 881165 Fax: 01787 313995. Website: www.hsebooks.co.uk

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