

Norfolk Health Protection Unit working with the Norfolk Public Health Network

Disease prevention advice for schools and similar establishments on:

'Open Farm' Visits

Some guidance for staff and organisers on avoiding communicable diseases in the open farm environment during recreational or educational visits

Introduction

Visiting an 'Open Farm' can be a valuable and enjoyable learning experience for adults and children alike.

It is, however, important to avoid unseen, as well as visible, hazards, which might exist in the farm environment.

Although the risks are generally low, some quite serious diseases can be transmitted to humans through contact with infected livestock, which otherwise appear well.

The germs involved include *E coli 0157*, *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, *Cryptosporidium* and many others.

This leaflet aims to explain how these risks can be reduced by careful planning and a few simple precautions.

Planning the visit

A preliminary visit or investigation of the 'Open Farm' may be helpful and yield useful information prior to the main outing.

The establishment should appear well run, clean, tidy and have good facilities and signage, and First Aid arrangements etc. Staff should have a positive attitude to your enquires.

The available facilities should be carefully checked out and must include adequate and suitable signposted handwashing arrangements with hot running water, soap and disposable towels or hot air dryers.

Some simple basic training for younger visitors about handwashing techniques, prior to the visit, may be helpful.

Restricted areas such as slurry pits and isolation pens for sick animals etc., should be clearly signposted and barriered.

Be sure that a sufficient number of staff members (and helpers) are clearly briefed, so that they may properly supervise your party. It may be that farm staff will also be available to supervise particular activities eg. the bottle feeding of young animals etc.

Find out in detail what activities visitors will be involved in. Ask about any special protective clothing or footwear which might be advisable.

Wellingtons are usually a good idea – but in any case open toed shoes should be avoided.

Clothing should be worn which can safely be washed in a 'hot cycle'.

Staff and helpers who may be pregnant must avoid any contact with lambing, newborn or the products of birth. These activities may cause harm to both mother and unborn baby.

Persons with certain illnesses (particularly those which affect an individual's ability to fight off infection – e.g. 'immune suppression' due to treatment or disease) would be advised to consult their medical advisor prior to the visit.

Local authority Environmental Health Departments may be able to give further detailed advice about visiting the particular 'Open Farms' in their area (see below for contact details).

Whilst on the farm

At the start of the visit, a farm staff member should advise the party about any potential hazards on the farm, and how to avoid them.

It is most important that visitors do not drink or eat anything (including sweets and chewing gum) or put fingers in mouths, whilst touring areas of the farm where animals are situated.

Food or drink should only be consumed in the specifically designated areas, which should be well away from where the animals are kept.

Cuts or grazes (especially on hands) should be covered with waterproof plasters.

Hands should be thoroughly washed and dried after visiting animal contact areas, after using toilet facilities, before eating or drinking, and on leaving the farm. Handwashing by certain groups (eg. infants or those with learning difficulties) are likely to need supervision.

Your party is advised not to consume unpasteurised farm produce (e.g. milk or cheese) or taste animal foodstuffs. Crops, such as fruit picked on the farm, should be thoroughly washed in drinking water before eating.

On leaving the farm

Muddy or soiled clothes and footwear may carry germs. It is important that hands are washed after contact with these items.

Footwear may need to be washed down and/or changed prior to the journey home. Buggy wheels may also need cleaning under a tap.

Dirty and soiled clothes should, if possible, be kept separate and carefully washed after the visit. A 'hot wash' cycle is ideal.

Further information and advice about local 'Open Farms' can be obtained from your local authority Environmental Health Department:

Breckland District Council	01362 695333
Broadland District Council	01603 431133
Great Yarmouth Borough Council	01493 846478
Kings Lynn & WN Borough Council	01553 616200
North Norfolk District Council	01263 513811
Norwich City Council	01603 212313/4
South Norfolk District Council	01508 533633