



If you go down to the farm today...

Visiting animal attractions is a fun experience for children but a visit can never be free from risk. Despite looking clean and healthy, animals naturally carry a wide range of germs, some of which may cause ill health if passed to humans. Two infections that can be passed from animals to humans are detailed below.

***Escherichia coli* O157:** The bacterial infection *Escherichia coli* O157 (known as verocytotoxin *E. coli* or VTEC), is a particular health risk especially for children under 5 years and can potentially cause serious disease. Symptoms are wide-ranging, from mild diarrhoea to severe abdominal pain and bloody diarrhoea. In a small number of patients (2-7% and mainly children), it can cause a serious condition resulting in kidney failure.

It usually takes 3 to 4 days for symptoms to develop, but it can be between 1 and 14 days, and symptoms can last for up to 2 weeks. Severe complications can last longer. Most people rid themselves of the bacteria after about a week but some people, especially children, may still excrete *E. coli* O157 in stools for several weeks after they are better.

***Cryptosporidium*:** Infection with this organism usually takes between 3 to 12 days for symptoms to develop, which can include watery diarrhoea, stomach pains, and fever. Again most people will rid themselves of the infection within 2 to 3 weeks, although in some individuals with weak immune systems, they can be affected for much longer.

- **in both these infections children should not go back to school, nursery or after school activities until free of symptoms for at least 48 hours**
- **anyone infected with *Cryptosporidium* should not go swimming for a further 2 weeks**
- **some individuals infected with *E. coli* O157, such as younger children, may be asked to submit additional stool samples before they can return to school or nursery**

Top Tips – Points to consider before a visit

- **choose** a farm accredited by CEVAS (Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme) or at least known to be well managed
- **read** the Industry Code of Practice – Advice for Teachers and Others which can be found at <http://www.visitmyfarm.org/component/k2/item/339-industry-code-of-practice>

- **ensure** the farm is well managed with clean grounds and public areas, and where animals are prohibited from outdoor picnic sites
- **check** hand-washing facilities are adequate with running water, liquid soap and disposable paper towels
- **discuss** with children the importance of following the Farm visit 'Dos and Don'ts', make sure they are wearing appropriate footwear and check that cuts and grazes on children's hands are covered with a waterproof dressing
- **if anyone shows signs of illness** (eg sickness or diarrhoea) after a farm visit, advise them to visit the doctor and explain that they have had recent contact with animals, so that a sample may be taken – if anyone in the group, particularly a young child has bloody diarrhoea seek immediate emergency medical attention

Do... eat and drink in designated areas only.	Don't... eat anything that has fallen on the floor.
Do... wash hands with soap and hot water where possible. Do not rely solely on the use of gels or wipes as they do not remove <i>E. coli</i> O157 in dirt.	Don't... allow kissing of farm animals or allow children to put their faces close to animals.
Do... supervise children closely when hand washing. Make sure hands are washed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • before eating or drinking • after touching animals • after touching fences or other surfaces in animal areas • after removing dirty shoes or boots worn on the farm 	Don't... allow eating or drinking, sucking of fingers, touching faces or putting objects in the mouth while touching animals or walking around the farm. This includes sweets, crisps or chewing gum.

Both *E. coli* O157 and *Cryptosporidium* are found in the gut of animals – you can catch them by:

- eating contaminated food
- touching infected animals or their faeces
- drinking raw water
- swimming in contaminated pools, ponds or streams

These infections can also be caught through contact with other people who have the illness. This can occur through poor hand hygiene after using the toilet and/or before food handling. Spread from one person to another occurs most commonly in households, nurseries and infant schools. Good hand hygiene is essential following episodes of diarrhoea and younger children may need assistance with this.

Additional Resources

e-Bug, operated by Public Health England, has a module Key Stage 2 students on farm hygiene, which can be downloaded free at:

http://www.e-bug.eu/junior_pack.aspx?cc=eng&ss=2&t=Farm%20Hygiene

For information on the farm hygiene lesson plan, email: **e-Bug@phe.gov.uk**