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|  | News Release |

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**Heading to the farm? Enjoy your visit safely, say health experts**

Public health experts at the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) West Midlands are reminding families of the simple steps they can take to make sure they enjoy visits to farms and petting zoos safely, over this half term and throughout summer.

With **Open Farm Sunday** coming up on **11 June**, people are being reminded that there are small things they can do to reduce the risk of nasty stomach bugs like Salmonella, Cryptosporidium and E. coli – which can be passed from farm animals to humans and cause illness.

UKHSA Health Protection Teams have already seen some outbreaks of stomach bugs linked to animal attractions across the country, so are urging anyone planning a trip to the farm to remember the importance of thoroughly and frequently washing hands with soap and water, to avoid getting bugs that could make them seriously ill. Once infected, you can also pass the bugs on to other people, who may also become unwell.

**Paul Fisher, Health Protection Consultant with UKHSA West Midlands, said:** “Thousands of people in the West Midlands region go to animal attractions each year. Visiting a farm is a fun day out, which is enjoyable and educational, particularly for children. However, animals can be the source of several bugs that can be passed to humans and cause illness, with some infections particularly serious for children or pregnant women. While the number of people who become ill is proportionally quite small, many cases could be avoided by practicing the correct hand hygiene.

“Infections can be picked up from the animal’s body, its poo or from areas where animals have recently been. If the germs are on your hands, you could accidentally pass them to your mouth. You can’t see the germs, so your hands may appear clean. Even if you’ve not been touching the animals themselves, you may have touched fences or other surfaces in areas with animals or sat on and touched grass that is contaminated.

“Washing your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water immediately after you’ve had contact with animals and before eating or drinking will reduce the risk of infection. Don’t use gels or wipes instead of soap and water, as these are not a substitute for washing your hands. Farms provide hand washing facilities, so we encourage people to make use of these to ensure the only things you take away from your visit are happy memories.”

**Annabel Shackleton, LEAF Open Farm Sunday Manager, said:** “We want people to continue to enjoy visiting farms and agricultural events safely. This means making time after touching animals, pens or fencing, to wash your hands thoroughly with liquid soap, running water and drying them with disposable towels. Adults should always supervise children to ensure that they wash their hands properly and grow up learning that clean hands are essential before eating! Anti bac hand gel is not a replacement for washing hands, especially not when spending time around animals. If a dummy drops on the ground it will need sterilising, and boots, shoes and pushchairs need to be washed down too when leaving a farm. Remember these simple things to ensure your farm visit is both enjoyable and safe.”

Open Farm Sunday will see many farms open their gates to the public which might not normally do so. For more details, including which farms are open, visit the [Open Farm Sunday homepage](https://farmsunday.org/).

**For more information contact UKHSA West Midlands press office on 0121 232 9223/4 Out Of Hours 07834 311 393**

**Notes to Editors**

1. **What to do when visiting a farm**

Following the simple rules listed below will help to keep you and your children safe from infections that may be found on open farms. Pregnant women need to take particular care as infections acquired from animals can be harmful to them and their unborn baby.

* Do wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after you have touched animals, fences or other surfaces in animal areas. All open farms provide handwashing facilities for visitors.
* Do wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before eating or drinking.
* Do remove and clean boots or shoes that might have become soiled and clean pushchair wheels. Then wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.
* Do supervise children closely to ensure that they wash their hands thoroughly.
* Washing your hands should take about 20 seconds – the same time that it takes to recite a single verse of “Old Macdonald Had A Farm”.
* Do eat and drink in picnic areas or cafes only.
* Do not put hands on faces or fingers in mouths while petting animals or walking round the farm.
* Do not kiss farm animals or allow children to put their faces close to animals.
* Do not eat or drink while touching animals or walking round the farm. This includes not eating sweets, crisps or chewing gum.
* Do not eat anything that has fallen on the floor.
* Do not use gels or wipes instead of washing hands with soap and water. Gels and wipes do not remove bugs in dirt.
1. **What should I do if I feel unwell after a farm visit?**
* If you or anyone in your group feels unwell or has any symptoms, for example is sick or has diarrhoea within two weeks of visiting a farm, contact your GP or call NHS 111 as soon as possible. If you or anyone in your group, particularly a young child, has bloody diarrhoea, seek immediate emergency medical attention.
* You should not attend school/childcare/work until you have been free of sickness or diarrhoea for two days. If you are diagnosed with Cryptosporidium, you must not go swimming until two weeks after you are free of sickness or diarrhoea as the bugs are resistant to chlorine. Tests may be required to confirm that a child is free from some infections.
* Parents should confirm with their health professional whether it is safe for them to return before the child returns to school or nursery.
1. Further information on zoonoses – infections that spread from animals to humans: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/zoonotic-diseases-zoonoses-guidance-data-and-analysis>
2. Advice for pregnant women on infections that can be transmitted via contact with animals that are or have recently given birth: [www.gov.uk/guidance/pregnancy-advice-on-contact-with-animals-that-are-giving-birth](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/pregnancy-advice-on-contact-with-animals-that-are-giving-birth)
3. The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is responsible for protecting every member of every community from the impact of infectious diseases, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear incidents and other health threats. We provide intellectual, scientific and operational leadership at national and local level, as well as on the global stage, to make the nation’s health secure. UKHSA is an executive agency, sponsored by the [Department of Health and Social Care](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health-and-social-care).

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