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Updated October 2009  
Large print copies are available

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## Farm visits and *E. coli* O157

Advice for the public



This leaflet provides advice on farm visits and how to reduce the risk of infection with *E. coli*

## What are the risks?

Although farm visits can be fun and educational it is important to remember that farm animals can carry viruses and bacteria, including *E. coli* O157, that can be harmful to people. In fact, some of these infections that may be passed from animals to humans can cause very serious illnesses, especially in children.

These illnesses occur when germs from animals are transferred to the mouth. If hands are placed in or near the mouth after touching animals, fences footwear or other surfaces that may be contaminated by animal droppings, it is possible you may become unwell. They can also occur when food is eaten with unwashed, contaminated hands, which allows you to swallow harmful bacteria or viruses.

## How should I prepare for a farm visit?

If the farm is open to the public, check that the public areas are as clean as possible (meaning no animal faeces), and that animals are not allowed into picnic areas. Suitable first aid arrangements should also be in place.

Check that washing facilities are available to visitors. These should have running water, soap and disposable towels or hand driers. These should be located near to places where animals can be touched and also where food is eaten.

If you are visiting with a party of children, they will need close supervision so it is important to ensure there are enough adults in the group.

Take wellington boots to wear during the visit and a change of footwear to travel home in.

## How can I minimise risks on the day?

Most importantly, children need to be supervised.

The following advice is applicable to everyone visiting the farm, but particularly to children:

- Do not put hands on faces or fingers in mouths while walking round the farm.
- Eat and drink in picnic areas only – never while touching animals or while walking around the farm. This includes not eating sweets, crisps or chewing gum.
- Do not eat anything that may have fallen on the ground.

- If touching or feeding animals, you should ensure that children do not put their faces close to the animals or put their fingers in their own or anyone else's mouths.
- Ensure hands are washed and dried thoroughly with soap and water immediately after any contact with animals and BEFORE eating and drinking. Young children, in particular, should be supervised while washing their hands.
- Eating areas should be well away from where animals are located.
- Keep away from sick animals, manure and slurry as these are particularly hazardous. If you do come into contact with any of these, ensure you wash and dry your hands immediately.

## What should I do before leaving?

Ensure that everyone in the group has washed their hands thoroughly with soap and water.

Footwear should be as free as possible from mud and droppings. Where possible, hose boots down with water and change into other footwear. Wash hands after removing and cleaning boots.

## NOTE: Additional advice for women who are pregnant

Pregnant women need to take particular care and specifically avoid direct contact with lambs and their droppings.

## What should I do if I feel unwell after a farm visit?

If you or anyone in your group, particularly children, feels unwell with sickness and diarrhoea within two weeks after visiting a farm, you should contact your GP or call NHS Direct on 0845 4647. Anyone who feels unwell should continue to wash their hands thoroughly and often.

Children under five should not attend school/nursery/group childcare until they have had no sickness or diarrhoea for two days. Parents should discuss their situation with their health professional before the child returns to school or nursery as tests may be required to confirm it is safe for them to return.

Anyone who suspects they or their children may have *E. coli* O157 should contact their GP or out-of-hours service as soon as possible.

## Where can I get more information?

Further information is available on the Health Protection Agency website at: [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk)