

Schools & Nurseries Update



Produced by the West Midlands Children's Leads Group

MARCH 2011

Farm visit dos and don'ts

Good hand hygiene is essential following episodes of diarrhoea and younger children may need assistance with this.

Do:

Eat and drink in designated areas only.

Wash hands with soap and hot water where possible and avoid use of gels or wipes as they do not remove *E. coli* O157 in dirt.

Supervise children closely when hand washing. Make sure that hands are washed after touching animals, fences or other surfaces in animal areas, before eating or drinking and after removing dirty shoes or boots worn on the farm.

Do not:

Allow sucking of fingers, touching faces or putting pens, pencils, crayons, etc in mouth.

Allow kissing of farm animals nor allow children to put their faces close to animals

Allow eating or drinking while touching animals or walking around the farm. This includes sweets, crisps or chewing gum.

Eat anything that has fallen on the floor.

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 bacteria, some of which may cause ill health if transmitted to humans.

The bacterial infection *Escherichia coli* O157 (known as vero cytotoxin *E. coli* or VTEC) is a particular health risk especially for children under five 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 three to four days for symptoms to develop but it can be between one and 14 days and symptoms can last for up to two 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.

Children should not go back to school, nursery or after school activities until they have been free of symptoms for at least 48 hours. 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 HSE Guidance for schools 'Preventing or controlling ill health from animals contact at visitor attraction – with supplement for teachers and others who organise visits for children'.
- **Ensure** the farm is well managed, with clean grounds and public areas and where animals are prohibited from outdoor picnic areas.
- **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 (e.g. 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.

***E. coli* O157 is found in the gut of many animals, mainly cattle, but has also been found in the faeces of other animals such as sheep and goats.**

You can catch it by eating contaminated food, touching infected animals or animal faeces, by drinking water from inadequately treated water supplies or by swimming in contaminated ponds or streams.

The infection can also be caught through contact with other people who have the illness through inadequate hand hygiene after using the toilet and/or before food handling, particularly in households, nurseries and infant schools.

For advice or more information contact your local Health Protection Unit (HPU):

West Midlands East: 0121 352 5345; West Midlands North: 01785 221126; West Midlands West: 01562 756300.