



# ZOONOSES GUIDANCE

FOR VOLUNTEERS AND GUESTS  
WITH ANIMAL CONTACT

# INTRODUCTION

**All farm animals naturally carry a range of diseases, some of which can also affect humans. These diseases are known as zoonoses, and during your work with animals your health may be at risk from them. Although some of these diseases (e.g. anthrax, brucellosis and rabies) are not common in Great Britain, good occupational hygiene practices will protect against them, as well as other more common zoonoses such as leptospirosis, orf or ringworm.**

Diseases transmitted from animals to humans can also affect visitors, especially children or the elderly, who are more vulnerable to infection. These illnesses include those resulting from infection with the organisms *Escherichia coli* 0157 (*E coli* 0157) and *Cryptosporidium parvum*.

If you think that you are ill because you have contracted a disease from an animal, you should consult your doctor quickly. Inform your doctor that you are assisting in a zoo and have had contact with animals.

Brucellosis, anthrax, bovine tuberculosis and BSE are notifiable or reportable diseases and subject to animal health legislation. Any person suspected of contracting any of these diseases must inform the Zoo Manager as soon as possible as these cases must be reported to the Divisional Veterinary Manager of DEFRA.

## Legal Requirements

Zoonoses are caused by microorganisms, which are subject to the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) 2002 (as amended).

Due to the above regulations, the Zoo Manager or Head Keeper must:

- assess the risks to health from any work activities which involve a hazardous substance (e.g. a microorganism);
- prevent or, where this is not reasonably practicable, adequately control exposure to the hazardous substances;
- introduce and maintain control measures;
- inform, instruct and train employees about the risks and precautions to be taken;
- regularly review risk assessments and the effectiveness of control measures.

When applying to become a volunteer, you must supply any information during your interview about any existing health or other conditions you have which may worsen the effects of contracting a zoonosis, or which may mean that you are more likely to contract one. For example:

- people without a spleen are very vulnerable to infection;
- people with transplanted organs may be more at risk from all zoonoses;
- pregnant women risk abortion if they are infected with *Chlamydia*, the organism causing enzootic abortion of ewes.

## Safe Working Practices

Consider the following:

- Follow your training at all times, remembering all aspects of the operational procedures and risk assessment carried out for the task that you are about to perform. If in doubt ASK!
- When assisting with the taking of blood samples, vacuum tubes rather than syringes will be used and all used needles will be put into a sharps box (to BS 7320: 1990). The box will then be labeled and disposed of safely.
- Do not use mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on newborn animals – use traditional husbandry methods of resuscitation such as massaging or clearing nostrils with straw.
- Avoid handling birth fluids or afterbirths with bare hands and bury or burn them.
- Control or eliminate rats, and use a fork or shovel, or wear gloves, to move dead rats.
- Always wash your hands and arms before eating/drinking or smoking.

## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

A COSHH assessment carried out by the Zoo Manager or Head Keeper will state whether PPE is needed for the task you are to carry out. Remember that PPE will be used only after all other precautions have been considered, however, the nature of your work with animals may mean that PPE is your only practicable option.

- Use face protection (for eyes and mouth) if there is a risk of splashing from urine or placental fluids.
- Make sure that whatever PPE you use is suitable, properly maintained, cleaned after use, stored in a clean area and that new PPE is CE marked.

## Personal Hygiene

Any work with animals inevitably involves contact with dung and urine, which contain disease-causing organisms. Personal hygiene is therefore vitally important. Washing facilities are available for staff or visitors who come into contact with animals. Ensure that you:

- Wash cuts and grazes immediately with soap and running water;
- Cover new and existing wounds with a waterproof dressing before beginning work – some organisms enter the body through open wounds;
- Wash hands and arms before eating, drinking or smoking after contacting animals, or working in areas with animal dung.

**Remember** – If at any time during the course of your work you feel that an animal may have been affected by any disease, inform the Zoo Manager or Head Keeper immediately so that the local Vet can be informed.