



Zoonoses Guidance



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* O157 (*E coli* O157) 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 employed in a Zoo and have 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 micro-organisms, 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;

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

When interviewing potential employees, about any existing health or other conditions they have which may worsen the effects of contracting a zoonosis, or which may mean that they are more likely to contract one. For example:

- 1 people without a spleen are very vulnerable to infection, and employers should consider carefully whether they allow such people to work with animals;
- 2 people with transplanted organs may be more at risk from all zoonoses;
- 3 pregnant women risk abortion if they are infected with *Chlamydia*, the organism causing enzootic abortion of ewes.

Safe working practices

Consider the following:

- 1 avoid or minimize the use of equipment or tools likely to cause cuts, abrasions or puncture wounds, and use safe working practices and PPE where appropriate;
- 2 when taking blood samples, use vacuum tubes rather than syringes and put all used needles into a sharps box to BS 7320: 1990. Label and dispose of the box safely, but not in your domestic waste;
- 3 do not use mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on newborn animals - use traditional husbandry methods of resuscitation such as massaging or clearing nostrils with straw;
- 4 avoid handling birth fluids or afterbirths with bare hands and bury or burn them;
- 5 control or eliminate rats, and use a fork or shovel, or wear gloves, to move dead rats.

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

Your COSHH assessment will help you decide whether PPE is needed. Remember that you should only consider using PPE after you have considered other steps such as not doing the task or avoiding contact with infected animals. However, the nature of your work with animals may mean that PPE is your only practicable option. Consider whether you need to:



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- 1 wear PPE when helping animals to give birth, handling afterbirths, working with obviously infected stock (e.g. with orf or ringworm), examining mouths or during rectal examinations.

Suitable PPE will include a waterproof apron or parturition gown, obstetric gauntlets for calving/lambing etc and plastic or synthetic rubber gloves for oral or rectal examinations;

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. Ensure that washing facilities are available for staff or visitors who come into contact with animals. Ensure that employees;

- 2 wash cuts and grazes immediately with soap and running water;
- 3 cover new and existing wounds with a waterproof dressing before beginning work - some organisms enter the body through open wounds.
- 4 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 that 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.