

# Animals in Healthcare Settings

## Infection Prevention and Control Guidance

### (Does Not Include Service Animals)

Interactions between humans and animals have positive social, psychological, and physiological effects on people. Programs for animal visitation, animal therapy, and service animals are designed to help patients regain their independence and well-being in healthcare-related settings. Due to the recent increase in animals in acute-care and long-term care settings, there have been concerns about the possibility of zoonotic infections being transferred from animals to people in these environments. These guidelines aim to establish a safe environment for animals, handlers, and patients. **This guidance is not intended for service animals.**

#### Background

Animals support humans in many ways, including by offering companionship and assistance. Benefits include:

- Reduction in stress, depression, and anxiety.
- Decreasing blood pressure and possibly decreasing cardiovascular risks.

Animals are used in therapeutic or wellness-improving procedures as part of animal-assisted interventions (AAls) including:

- Animal-assisted activities (AAA), which are meet-and-greet activities that provide opportunities for recreation, motivation, and education.
- Animal-assisted therapy (AAT), which is directed toward specific goals in which the animal meets specific criteria as an important part of the treatment process.

#### Infection Control Measures

Infection prevention focuses on maintaining clean, healthy, well-behaved animals. When allowing AAls, the following infection control measures should be in place:

- Bathe the animal with allergen-reducing shampoo within 24 hours of visiting a facility.
- Wipe the animal with a pet wipe prior to visit.
- Have the animal wear a tee shirt, vest, or other clothing.
- Clean and disinfect service animal collars, vests, leashes or harnesses, and other supplies frequently.
- Do not let other people handle items that go into the animal's mouth, such as toys and treats.
- Do not allow therapy animals to lick or give kisses.
- Animals should not be fed a raw meat diet
- Animals should not have access to areas designated for food preparation.
- Avoid contact between sick people and the animal as much as possible.
  - Therapy animals should not go into sick patients' rooms to avoid any spread of pathogens.
  - If contact cannot be avoided, the sick person should wear a cloth face covering when around the animal.
- The most important infection-control measure to prevent potential disease transmission is strict enforcement of **hand-hygiene measures** for all patients, staff, and residents after handling the animals.

#### Animal Criteria

Animals must:

- Be in a permanent home for a minimum of six months and cannot be the recent or current residents of an animal shelter, pound, or similar establishment.
- Be a domestic companion animal.
- Be at least one year old.
- Be registered or certified for animal-assisted therapy.
- Pass health and temperament evaluations.
- Have up-to-date animal health records.
- Be kept on a short leash with identification badges, vests, or bandanas on display if required.
- Have an animal handler 18 years of age or older.

#### Environmental Cleaning

If an animal has an elimination accident, the following should be completed:

- Wear gloves to remove the debris and clean the area.
- Dispose of any organic material and paper towels used should be disposed of in a plastic bag in a trash container.
- Disinfect the cleaned area with the facility's approved product following the label instructions for appropriate concentration and contact time.

#### Recommendation for Facilities

Facilities should designate at least one personnel to implement the policy, coordinate animal-human interactions and act as a liaison for handlers. This is to avoid confusion and to maintain standards for the safety of everyone involved.

#### Other Considerations

In addition to zoonotic disease, other concerns to consider when allowing animals into the healthcare setting, include:

- Phobias
- Allergies
- Cleanliness
- Animal induced injuries (scratches or bites)
- Immunocompromised individuals

For additional information, please visit:

[Animals in Health-Care Facilities | Infection Control | CDC](#)

You may also contact the Healthcare Associated Infections Antimicrobial Resistance Program at (304) 558-5358