

What kind of animals can participate in Animal-Assisted Therapy?

Companion animals like dogs and cats are most common. However, small horses and rabbits can also participate.

What kind of animals cannot participate in Animal-Assisted Therapy?

These animals are recommended to be excluded due to their temperament and higher probability of transferring zoonotic diseases.

- Nonhuman primates
- Reptiles and amphibians
- Hamsters, gerbils, mice, and rats
- Prairie dogs and hedgehogs
- Animals that have not been potty trained or for which measures cannot be taken to prevent patients.

What can I do if I want my animal to participate in Animal-Assisted Therapy?

- Reach out to the specific facilities to know their specific process to be approved. Each facility may be different in their policy surrounding animal visitation.
- The animal is recommended to be registered or certified for Animal-Assisted Therapy.
- Provide healthcare facilities with necessary vaccination and health records.
- If the therapy animal is a dog, it is recommended that they pass a temperament evaluation from a reliable source and provide the facility with the necessary supporting documentation.

What are the risks of having animals in a healthcare setting?

The risk of having therapy animals in healthcare facilities is the spread of zoonotic diseases. Animals can spread pathogens from one patient to another, so it is best to follow guidelines for prevention.

How do I best prevent the spread of pathogens?

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. Other recommendations include:

- Bathe the animal with allergen-reducing shampoo within 24 hours of visiting a facility.
- Wipe the animal with a pet wipe prior to the 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.

Are animal shelter animals able to visit the facility?

No, animals must be in a permanent home for a minimum of six months and cannot be recent or current residents of an animal shelter, pound, or similar establishment.

What is the difference between an Animal-Assisted Therapy animal and a service animal?

The ADA defines a service animal as a dog that is trained to do work or perform tasks for a person with a disability. The guidelines for Animal-Assisted Therapy animals in healthcare facilities do **not** apply to service animals.

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