

Controlling the Risks of Zoonoses on Open Farms

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Open farm

An 'open farm' is a commercial operation the primary purpose of which is leisure or entertainment and at which visitors are encouraged to have hands-on contact with animals

Recent Outbreaks of E.coli infection

- Godstone Farm, Godstone, Surrey (93)
- Horton Park Childrens Farm, Epsom , Surrey (0)
- White Post Farm, Nottinghamshire (2)
- The Word of Country Life Farm, Exmouth, Devon (3)

Outbreaks are comparatively rare, normally involve small numbers who make full recovery, attract little media attention.

~1million school children will visit a farm in 2009

HPA estimates ~1,000 cases each year but mainly food related

Common Zoonoses on Farms

Zoonoses are diseases that pass from animals to humans caused by exposure to micro-organisms such as:

- Campylobacter
- Cryptosporidium
- Salmonella
- Chlamydia
- E.coli

Animals act as reservoir for bacteria etc

Direct or indirect transfer to humans

Why concern for E.coli?

- Many strains of E.coli bacteria
- Normally cause diarrhoea and vomiting
- Some common strains (e.g. O157 and O26) produce verocytotoxins which can produce a more serious condition - haemolytic uraemic syndrome (HUS) - and lead to kidney failure
- Children (u18) and the elderly (60+) particularly vulnerable
- Few bacteria (10's) required to cause infection
- Bacteria can survive for long periods in the open
- Likely to be present in farm animals (ruminants) and wild birds and rabbits
- Animals may not show any symptoms, present in gut and excreted in faeces

Modes of Transfer

A. Direct contact

- Stroking or petting animals
- Feeding animals

B. Indirect contact

- Climbing or leaning on enclosure fences or gates
- Sitting on contaminated grass or furniture
- Removing dirty shoes or boots
- Possibly play equipment/areas

Followed by 'hand to mouth' transfer

Hazardous Substance

Agents that cause zoonoses are substances hazardous to health under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (as amended) (COSHH)

Fall within definitions of 'micro-organisms, biological agents and substances and substances hazardous to health' under Regulation 2

E.coli O157 is a Category 3 biological agent in The Approved List of Biological Agents produced by the ACDP

Duties under COSHH

- Reg 3 – Extends duty to protection of public (sfairp)
- Reg 6 – Risk assessment and implementation
- Reg 7 – Prevent or, where not reasonably practicable, adequately control exposure
- Reg 12 - Provide information, instruction, training

Supervision is a control measure under Reg7

Don't forget protection of staff

Adequately control

- Reduce exposure below WEL
(None for micro-organisms)
- Apply the measures set out in reg7(3) in the stated priority order
- Follow the specific measures listed in Reg 7(4)
- Apply the principles of 'good occupational hygiene practice' (see Schedule 2A)

(Schedule 3 does not have effect on farms)

**EFFECTIVE CONTROLS PROPORTIONATE TO RISKS
& SENSIBLE RISK MANGAGEMENT**

Duties under HSWA'74

Duties as 'employers', 'self-employed persons' or 'owners of buildings under Sections 2, 3, or 4

'to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health of

Control Measures

Control measures are predicated on the assumption that ALL animals (cattle, ewes, lambs, pigs, goats, ponies and rabbits) are carrying E.coli O157 bacteria

Eliminates need for routine testing of animals as a control measure

Control Measures

1. Good general cleanliness around farm
2. Separate eating and contact areas
3. Adequate and suitable hand washing facilities
4. Proper instruction and training of staff
5. Information for visitors
6. Supervision of animal contact and hand-washing areas

1. Good General Cleanliness

- Pathways, walkways, eating areas, play areas free from animal droppings/faeces
- Eating areas free from accumulations of waste food
- Play equipment visibly free from faecal contamination
- Cleanliness of animals in contact areas
- Rodent control

NB 1. Don't expect routine washing and disinfection of fences and handrails

2. Standards of animal hygiene e.g. cleaning, washing and disinfecting of animal housing refer to Animal Health

2. Separate eating and contact areas

Eating Area

- Exclude animals and fowls
- Prevent contact with animals
- Discourage wild birds
- Food and drinks kiosk/shop (*not near farm entrance*)
- Disallow eating and drinking in other areas

Contact Area

- Petting and feeding of animals allowed
- Careful selection of animals
- Enforce no eating and drinking rules
- No age restriction
- Exits lead to washing facilities

3. Washing facilities

- Located within easy reach of exits from contact areas, entrances to eating areas and farm exits*
- Number of hand-washing stations depends on visitor numbers, nature of farm, activities of visitors
- Range of heights of wash basins
- Clean running water, liquid soap and paper towels or hand driers

NB 1. No reuse of used water or towels

2. Alcohol gels or wipes are not acceptable substitutes.

4. Proper instruction and training of staff

- Familiar with layout of farm
- Understand of health risks
- Knowledge of control measures and site rules
- Competent to deal with visitors
- Appreciate need to report illness.

5. Information for visitors

- Health risks
- Sites rules
- Site layout
- Location of eating areas
- Location of washing facilities
- Importance of thorough hand washing
- Instructions on proper hand washing
- What to do if feel unwell after visit

FORMS OF INFORMATION

6. Supervision

- Contact areas
- Washing facilities

Enforcement Responsibilities

Open farms (~1,000) fall to LAs to inspect and enforce

Farm attractions mainly fall to HSE but some dedicated businesses may fall to LAs

Open days on working farms remain with HSE

Local agreements and flexible warranting

Enforcement Expectations

Guidance see AIS 23 and SIM 01/2009/04 or
LAC41/5

Enforcement activity proportionate to risk to health

Considerable room for discretion

Remember key issues are:

- Contact/non-contact areas
- Adequate washing facilities suitably located
- Separate eating area
- Information/instruction and training

Inspection Tips

- Request information before visit:
 - ✓ Site map or plan
 - ✓ Risk assessments
 - ✓ Calculations for number of washing stations
 - ✓ Site rules
 - ✓ Public information and instructions
- Visit when open/closed?

Sources of information

<http://www.hse.gov.uk>

(<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais23.pdf>)

<http://www.dh.gov.uk>

www.hpa.org.uk