

Should I let visitors stroke my animals?

Holding a lamb and stroking a calf are very special activities to offer. But host farmers must take precautions to prevent visitors becoming ill through diseases such as E coli O157 and Cryptosporidiosis. Hand washing facilities, signage and supervision are essential.

The industry has developed a new **Code of Practice** that has been drawn up with input from LEAF, other rural and farm attraction organisations. You are strongly advised to download and read this code which is available through the Open Farm Sunday website.

Hand washing facilities

If your visitors come into contact with farm animals you **MUST** provide hand washing facilities. You should provide:

- Running water - ideally warm, but for one off events in the summer such as Open Farm Sunday, cold water is acceptable. (Basins/buckets/troughs of still water are NOT adequate)
- Liquid soap (NOT hard soap).
- Paper towels (NOT towelling hand towels).

Warm water encourages your visitors to wash their hands, so you should provide this, especially in winter months. For a June event, you may consider cold water will be OK, but you should note this on your risk assessment and consider how you will encourage visitors to wash their hands thoroughly.

Ideally your visitors must wash their hands for two minutes, so you should have enough basins/taps to allow this.

Make sure there is plenty of signage reminding visitors to wash their hands, pointing them to the facilities and encouraging them to do so thoroughly.

Anti-bacterial gels – these are NOT a suitable alternative. The infection is carried in the dirt, so this must be removed through washing in running water.

Planning animal contact areas

General layout – Areas where visitors come into contact with animals should be segregated from eating areas. You should position hand washing facilities as soon as possible after the animal contact area and before the eating area and ensure visitors pass by the facilities. Farm animals, including poultry, are forbidden from eating areas. Eating areas should also be double fenced from livestock to prevent contact.

Supervision – this is vital. There should be an experienced helper/trained member of staff in with the animals who can inform visitors about daily routines etc, as well as remind them to wash their hands. Look out for dummies, sweets etc – eating and smoking in animal contact areas should be forbidden. In unsupervised areas with livestock, there should be signs saying touching, feeding or petting is not allowed.

Signage – You should put up signs in appropriate places to remind visitors to wash their hands. These should be positioned at the exit of animal contact areas and at the exit of the farm, to remind visitors before they leave. LEAF has produced some signs for you to download, print off and display on the day, available via the Open Farm Sunday website.

