

Recommendations for Live Animal Exhibits on The University of Texas at Austin Campus

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This document provides standardized recommendations for minimizing risks associated with animals in public settings. In general, the university discourages the use of live animal exhibits due to health and safety concerns for both the university community and the animals. However, it is also understood that live animal exhibits can provide an educational and enjoyable experience if proper precautions are taken.

Health and safety concerns and guidelines

Contact with any other living organisms creates the potential for disease transmission. Diseases that are spread from animals to humans are called *zoonoses/zoonotic diseases*. Some zoonotic diseases that may be of concern at live animal exhibits are: rabies, E. coli infection, cryptosporidiosis, psittacosis, salmonellosis, and toxoplasmosis. Risks of transmission can be reduced in two ways:

1. Avoid all direct contact with animals or surfaces with which they have come in contact
2. Allow only supervised contact followed by hand washing

All areas in which the public has direct contact with animals must have access to hand-washing facilities that are in the immediate vicinity of the contact (or an equivalent, such as antibacterial hand-wipes).

The recommendation to wash hands is the single most important prevention step for reducing the risk for disease transmission.

Wild animals, including primates, animals considered to be a high rabies risk in Texas (bats, raccoons, foxes, skunks, and coyote), venomous animals, and domestic animals with an unknown health history are not permitted in animal exhibits where there is public contact. Wild animals may be used in demonstrations provided they are handled by an experienced person and controlled at all times. No *Dangerous Wild Animals* (as defined in the Texas Health and Safety Code, Chapter 822, Regulation of Animals, Subchapter E. Dangerous Wild Animals, § 822.101. Definitions; see list below), shall be brought onto campus for **any** exhibit or demonstration purpose.

Any injuries caused to a human by any animal brought onto campus should be reported to Environmental Health and Safety (512-471-3511) with the following information: name of victim, contact information for victim, species of animal, event, date, time, name of vendor/owner, contact information for vendor/owner, description of injury. In addition, the following form must be filled out as soon as possible:

<http://www.utexas.edu/business/vp/forms/TORT-FORM.pdf>.

In the event that any animal brought onto campus escapes its enclosure, UTPD (512-471-4441; 1-4441 from campus phone) should be called immediately.

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Animal Areas

In settings where direct animal contact is encouraged (e.g., petting zoos), the following precautions should be taken to reduce the risk for injuries and disease transmission:

- Design of the entry and exit points for animal contact areas should be planned to facilitate proper visitor flow through transition areas (see the diagram on page six of this document).
- Transition areas must include educational information and hand-washing facilities (or an acceptable equivalent, such as antibacterial hand-wipes). Page five of this document outlines hand-washing recommendations.
- Fences, gates, or other types of barriers can restrict uncontrolled access to animals and animal contact areas and ensure that visitors enter and exit through transition areas.
- Animal feed and water should not be accessible to the public.
- When possible, animal areas should be set up in the grass to avoid waste runoff.

Animal Care and Management

The risk for disease or injuries from animal contacts can be reduced by carefully managing the specific animals used for such contacts. The following recommendations should be considered for management of animals in contact with the public:

- **Animal care.** Animals should be monitored daily by their owners or caretakers for signs of illness, and they should receive appropriate veterinary care. Sick/ill animals and animals from herds with a recent history of abortion or diarrhea should not be exhibited. Animals should be exhibited to minimize stress and overcrowding, which can increase shedding of microorganisms.
- **Veterinary care.** Animal owners should retain and use the services of a licensed veterinarian. Vaccination, preventive care, and parasite control appropriate for the species should be provided. Health certificates from a licensed veterinarian should be up-to-date according to local or state requirements for animals in areas where public contact might occur.
- **Rabies.** All animals should be housed to reduce potential exposures from wild animal rabies reservoirs. Mammals should also be up-to-date on their rabies vaccinations. These steps are particularly critical in areas where rabies is endemic and in venues where animal contact is encouraged (e.g., petting zoos). Because of the extended incubation period for rabies, unvaccinated mammals should be vaccinated at least 3 months before they have contact with the public. Mammals that are too young to be vaccinated at least 3 months before potential human contact should be used only if additional restrictive measures are available to reduce and manage risks. These measures can include using only animals that were born to vaccinated mothers and housed to avoid rabies exposure. Another measure that might be used is to maintain a record of visitors to facilitate locating persons or groups in situations where tracing contacts might be required (e.g., potential rabies exposures).
- **Animal births.** If animal births occur, ensure that the public has no contact with animal birthing by-products. The environment should be thoroughly cleaned after each birth, and all waste products should be properly discarded. Holding such events outside is preferable, because if they are held inside, risks for organisms being spread through ventilation systems occur.

Food and beverages

The following guidelines should be considered about food and beverages:

- No food or beverages should be allowed in animal areas.
- Smoking, toys, and use of pacifiers, spill-proof cups (“sippy cups”), and baby bottles should not be permitted in animal areas.
- Do not allow the public to eat or drink unpasteurized dairy products.

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Cleaning procedures

The following guidelines should be considered about cleaning procedures:

- Manure and soiled animal bedding should be removed promptly.
- Animal waste and specific tools for waste removal (e.g., shovels and pitchforks) should be confined to designated areas restricted from public access.
- Manure and soiled bedding should not be transported or removed through non-animal areas or transition areas used by visitors. If this is unavoidable, precautions should be taken to avoid spillage and aerosolization.

Supervision of children

The following guidelines should be considered about the supervision of children:

- Children should be closely supervised during contact with animals to discourage contact with manure and soiled bedding. All children less than five years old require supervision.
- Hand-to-mouth contact (e.g., thumb-sucking) should be discouraged.
- Appropriate hand washing should be required and supervised.

Staff

The following guidelines should be considered about staff at live animal exhibits:

- Trained staff should be present in areas where animal contact is permitted to encourage appropriate human-animal interactions, reduce risk for exposure (e.g., by promptly cleaning up wastes), and process reports of injuries and exposures.

Feeding animals

The following guidelines should be considered about feeding animals:

- If feeding animals is permitted, only food provided by the vendor/owner for that purpose should be allowed.
- Food provided for animal consumption should not be eaten by humans and should not be provided in containers that can be eaten by persons (e.g., ice cream cones). This policy will reduce the risk for animal bites and the probability of children eating food that has come into contact with animals.

Use of animal areas for public (non-animal) activities

The following guidelines should be considered about the use of animal areas for public, non-animal activities:

- Zoonotic pathogens can contaminate the environment for substantial periods. If animal areas need to be used for public events, these areas should be cleaned and disinfected, particularly if food and beverages are served.
- Materials with smooth, impervious surfaces (e.g., steel, plastic, and sealed concrete) are easier to clean than other materials (e.g., wood or dirt floors). Removing organic material (bedding, feed, and manure) before using disinfectants is important.

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Transition Areas between Animal and Non-animal Areas

Providing transition areas for visitors to pass through when entering and exiting animal areas is critical. The transition areas between animal and non-animal areas should be designated as clearly as possible, even if they need to be conceptual rather than physical (see the diagram on page six of this document). In these areas, information should be provided regarding the 1) prevention of infection and injury and 2) location of hand-washing facilities and instructions for visitors to wash their hands upon exiting. The following guidelines should be considered about transition areas:

- Signs informing visitors that they are entering an animal area should be posted at the entrance transition areas. These signs should also instruct visitors not to eat, drink, or place their hands in their mouth while in the animal area. Visitors should be discouraged from taking strollers, baby bottles, pacifiers, food, and beverages into areas where animal contact is encouraged or where contact with animal manure or bedding can occur. Visitor traffic should be controlled to avoid overcrowding the animal area.
- Exit transition areas should be marked with signs instructing the public to wash their hands. Hand-washing stations should be available and accessible to all visitors, including children and persons with disabilities (see an example of this sign on page five of this document).

Definitions

Dangerous Wild Animal: bobcat, baboon, bear, caracal, chimpanzee, cheetah, cougar, coyote, gorilla, hyena, jackal, jaguar, lion, leopard, lynx, ocelot, orangutan, serval, tiger, and any hybrid of an animal listed. In addition, elephants, wolves, and wolf-hybrids, badgers, wolverines, feral pigs, deer, moose, elk, and bison are banned from public exhibits or demonstrations. Rare exceptions may be made at the discretion of Environmental Health and Safety. Any other wild animal needs to be approved by Environmental Health and Safety.

Acknowledgements

Information in this document was obtained from the following sources: Association of Zoos and Aquariums, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The Humane Society of the United States, and the Association of Zoo Veterinarians.

Note: Environmental Health and Safety reserves the right to deny approval for any live animal exhibit.

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Hand-Washing Recommendations to Reduce Disease Transmission From Animals in Public Settings

Hand washing is the single most important prevention step for reducing disease transmission.

How to Wash Hands

- Wet hands with running water; place soap in palms; rub together to make a lather; scrub hands vigorously for 20 seconds; rinse soap off hands; then dry hands with a disposable towel.
- If possible, turn off the faucet by using a disposable paper towel.
- Assist young children with washing their hands.

Hand-Washing Facilities or Stations

- Hand-washing facilities should be accessible and sufficient for the maximum anticipated attendance and configured for use by children, adults, and those with disabilities.
- Hands should always be washed after leaving animal areas and before eating or drinking.
- Hand-washing stations should be conveniently located between animal and nonanimal areas and in the non-animal food concession areas.
- Maintenance should include routine cleaning and restocking of paper towels and soap.
- Running water should be of sufficient volume and pressure to remove soil from hands. Volume and pressure might be substantially reduced if the water supply is furnished from a holding tank. Therefore, a permanent pressured water supply is preferable.
- The hand-washing station should be designed so that both hands are free for hand washing.
- Hot water is preferable, but if the hand-washing stations are supplied with only cold water, a soap that emulsifies easily in cold water should be provided.
- Communal basins, where water is used by more than one person, do not constitute adequate hand-washing facilities.

Hand-Washing Agents

- Liquid soap dispensed by a hand or foot pump is recommended.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be used if soap and water cannot be made available and are effective against multiple common disease agents (e.g., *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, and *Campylobacter*) when soap and water are not available. However, they are ineffective against certain organisms (e.g., bacterial spores, *Cryptosporidium*, and certain viruses).
- Hand sanitizers are less effective if hands are visibly soiled. Therefore, visible contamination and dirt should be removed to the extent possible before using hand sanitizers.

Hand-Washing Signs

At venues where human-animal contact occurs, signs regarding proper hand-washing practices are critical to reduce disease transmission.

- Signs that are reminders to wash hands should be posted at exits from animal areas.
- Signs should direct visitors and animal handlers to hand-washing stations.
- Signs with proper hand-washing instructions should be posted at hand-washing stations and restrooms to encourage proper practices.
- Hand-washing signs should be placed in food concession areas.

Example of a Hand-Washing Sign

How

- Wet hands with running water
- Place soap into palms
- Rub together to make a lather
- Scrub hands vigorously for 20 seconds
- Rinse soap off hands
- Dry hands

When

- After going to the toilet
- After exiting animal areas
- Before eating
- Before preparing foods

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Examples of designs for animal contact settings, including clearly designated animal areas, non-animal areas, and transition areas with hand-washing stations and signage

