



Avoiding ill health at open farms - Advice to teachers

AIS23 Supplement

Introduction

This supplement to AIS23 *Avoiding ill health at open farms - Advice to farmers* contains advice for teachers and others who organise visits to farms. One of the highlights of such visits is seeing and possibly contacting animals, and this supplement advises on controlling the risk of infections contracted from them.

All animals naturally carry a range of micro-organisms, some of which can be transmitted to humans, where they may cause ill health. Some infections which may be contracted on farms, such as the verocytotoxin-producing bacterium *Escherichia coli* O157 (*E coli* O157), present a serious hazard and potentially cause severe disease.

While the hazard from infection resulting from a farm visit is real, the risks are readily controlled by familiar measures which should be an everyday part of life. The following sensible steps will help make your visit even more safe, healthy and enjoyable.

Before your visit:

- discuss visit arrangements with the farm management;
- assure yourself that the facilities provided match the recommendations in the main AIS23 information sheet;
- decide what the ratio of pupils to teachers/assistants/parents should be. As a general rule, there should be one supervisor to every eight children under eight years old. If supervision levels are less than this, consider whether you should not allow direct contact with the animals for children under eight;
- discuss with pupils the rules for the visit, stressing that they must not eat or chew outside the areas in which you permit them to do so;
- make sure that pupils wear appropriate clothing, including sturdy outdoor shoes (not sandals) or wellington boots if possible;
- check that cuts, grazes etc on children's hands are covered with a waterproof dressing.

During and after the visit, make sure that the children:

- do not kiss animals;

- always wash their hands thoroughly before eating, after any contact with animals and again before leaving the farm;
- eat only in designated areas;
- do not eat food which has fallen to the ground;
- do not suck fingers or put hands, pens, pencils or crayons etc in mouths;
- do not taste animal foods, ie eat only food that they have brought with them, or food for human consumption they have bought on the farm;
- clean or change their footwear before leaving, remembering to wash their hands after any contact with animal faeces on their footwear.

Check that the children stay in their allocated groups during the visit, and that they:

- do not use or pick up tools (eg spades and forks) unless permitted to do so by farm staff;
- do not climb on to walls or animal pens etc;
- listen carefully and follow the instructions and information given by the farm staff;
- approach and handle animals quietly and gently;
- do not chase, frighten or torment the animals.

Remember:

- the children are your responsibility during the visit;
- you should supervise them during the visit, in particular during hand washing to make sure that each child washes thoroughly. Farm staff may be able to help you with this supervision;
- allow plenty of time before eating or leaving so that the children do not have to rush.

If a member of your group shows signs of illness (eg sickness or diarrhoea) after a visit, advise them or their parent/guardian to visit the doctor and explain that they have had recent contact with animals.