

Animals in Healthcare Facilities

Note: Terms in bold are defined in the **Definitions** section.

If you have any questions or comments contact IPC at ipcsurvstdadmin@ahs.ca

Note: Animal visits may be restricted during COVID-19 pandemic. Refer to the AHS Insite page for details: [Home>Information For Health Topics>novel coronavirus \(COVID-19\)>Family Support & Visitation of Patients & Residents](#)

Best practice recommendations

Purpose

- These recommendations are to reduce the risk of zoonosis or animal-human disease transmission during animal visitation, animal-assisted activities, animal-therapy, and resident/facility animal programs.

Application

These recommendations apply to:

- all species of animals;
- acute care and continuing care (including facility living and supportive living) inpatient settings;
- all Alberta Health Services (AHS) employees, members of the medical and midwifery staffs, students, volunteers, and other persons acting on behalf of AHS;
- animals used for research must be handled according to applicable research protocols.

These recommendations do not apply to:

- home living.
- service animals - refer to [Alberta Service Dogs Act](#) or [Blind Person's Rights Act](#) for guidelines regarding service animals in healthcare facilities.

Recommendations

1. General

1.1 Animals are to be excluded from:

- a) food preparation areas;
- b) medication preparation areas;
- c) Operating Room (OR) including recovery areas;
- d) Medical Device Reprocessing (MDR), Laboratory and Diagnostic Imaging (DI) areas;
- e) critical care areas including ICU*;
- f) neonatal nurseries;
- g) patient/resident bathrooms;
- h) Immunosuppressed or neutropenic patients*.

*Animal visitation may be considered in consultation with the care provider team for chronic/palliative patients.

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1.2 Animals in healthcare are to be:

- a) In good health having been examined annually by a licensed veterinarian and free of diseases. Rabies vaccinations current and available. Other vaccinations determined by the veterinarian in the best interest of the animal based on lifestyle, risk assessment and whom the animal will be in contact with. Owners and handlers shall be responsible for making available up to date veterinarian and vaccination records when their pet visits a facility.
- b) Animals fed a raw meat diets including poultry, dehydrated animal products or pigs' ears are excluded from visiting for 90 days (APIC & JAVMA).
- c) Animals are to be immediately removed from the facility if they appear ill or sick during visit.

1.3 Animals with any of the following condition(s) are excluded from visiting for one week following the resolution of:

- a) diarrhea (if animal has been diagnosed with *Clostridium difficile*, *Salmonella*, and *Giardia* and cats free of *Toxoplasma* oocysts veterinary documentation should be provided to show animal has been treated);
- b) vomiting;
- c) sneezing, coughing;
- d) antimicrobial, immunosuppressive therapy;
- e) skin infections both open and closed, ear infections, skin and soft tissue infections (SSTI). Suspend visitation until veterinary documentation is provided to show the treated animal is free of MRSA;
- f) fleas, ticks, external or internal parasites (including worms).

1.4 Only domesticated animals are permitted in healthcare facilities (HCF); however, the following are excluded:

- a) reptiles and amphibians;
- b) all rodents, including hamsters, gerbils, mice, rats and hedgehogs;
- c) animals that have not been litter trained or when measures cannot be taken to prevent exposure to animal's excrement;
- d) zoo animals, exotic mammals and petting zoo animals.

1.5 Visits inside patient rooms will be conducted only with explicit patient and roommate(s) permission before entering room.

1.6 Licking should be prevented as well as "shaking paws" even if paws are clean as floors may be contaminated.

1.7 All visiting, therapy or resident animals in HCF must be approved by site management or designate. Facilities are responsible for documenting and tracking animals based on facility policy.

2. If an animal bites or scratches

2.1 Nursing staff are to be alerted immediately to ensure appropriate treatment is given and documentation occurs.

2.2 All incidents of biting or scratching are reported to Environmental Public Health Inspectors immediately by calling Health Link Alberta 1-800-408-LINK(5465). If an employee is exposed this must also be reported to Workplace Health & Safety (WHS).

3. Animal related hygiene practices

- 3.1 Hand hygiene must be performed as per AHS policy and procedure by all who have contact with animals. Patients/residents should be assisted with hand hygiene as needed:
 - a) patients/residents: Before **and** after animal contact;
 - b) handlers: Between rooms;
 - c) handlers are to carry alcohol based hand sanitizer (ABHR);
 - d) after cleaning up pet excrement, litter boxes, bird cages or aquariums.
- 3.2 Where possible, animals are permitted on beds and laps with a disposable or washable waterproof barrier, e.g., a soaker pad or blue liner pad should be placed between their clothes/blankets and the animal.
 - a) Any furniture that animals have been permitted on (chairs, benches etc..) need to be routinely cleaned and disinfected following facility procedures with facility approved cleaner.
- 3.3 Animals and handlers are to have no contact with medical equipment, invasive devices, wounds, dressing or bandages.
- 3.4 Visitation of patients under additional precautions is to be done only in consultation with Infection Prevention and Control or designate.
- 3.5 No visitation when patient is eating or undergoing medical procedure.
- 3.6 Any mess, including excrement, generated by the animal is the responsibility of the handler to clean up immediately. Facilities may supply clean up materials as necessary. For resident animals, a facility policy should be in place that identifies who is responsible for clean-up and what procedures are to be followed.

4. Animal-assisted activities and animal-therapy (pet therapy) animals

- 4.1 Animal-therapy animals must follow the general recommendations under sections 1, 2 and 3 of this document for visiting HCF.
- 4.2 It is recommend animals be registered with a recognized pet therapy program if they are visiting HCF as pet therapy animals.
- 4.3 Animal therapy handler assumes responsibility and accompanies the animal during entire visit.

5. Personal or visiting animals

- 5.1 Personal or visiting animals must follow the general recommendations under section 1, 2 and 3 of this document for visiting HCF.
- 5.2 Visits to HCF should be in consultation with facility staff.
- 5.3 Handler assumes responsibility and accompanies the animal during entire visit.
- 5.4 All dogs are required to wear clean leash/collar. Leashes must be non-retractable and less than 2 meters in length. No choke or pinch type collars as they may injure fingers. Unleashed animals are to be carried in a clean carrier.
- 5.5 Personal or visiting animals are not allowed to visit other patients.

6. Resident/facility animals or pets

- 6.1 Resident/facility animals must follow the general recommendations under section 1, 2 and 3 of this document.
- 6.2 Birds or fish are not recommended as resident/facility pets in acute care.
- 6.3 There must be a dedicated person(s) responsible for the care of any resident or facility pet. Documentation is required and this individual is responsible for:
 - a) ongoing veterinary care arrangements;
 - b) feeding;
 - c) cleaning and sanitizing living space, bedding and toys following facility procedures, using facility approved products.
- 6.4 There is a dedicated storage area for pet supplies. This area must be away from the medication room, clean and sterile supply rooms, kitchens and resident areas.
- 6.5 Animals should be kept off furniture not covered in water resistant fabric or covered by a barrier.
- 6.6 Bowls and litter boxes must be stored in a place where residents do not have access to it. It is also recommended that a ‘walk-off tray’ be used to contain scattered litter and excrement. Litter must be changed routinely.
- 6.7 Bird cages should have a cleanable or wipeable plastic container under the cage to contain scattered birdseed, feathers, etc. Cages must be cleaned routinely.
- 6.8 Aquarium water should not be disposed of in sinks used for hand hygiene, food preparation or drinking water. Sinks must be cleaned and disinfected following use.
- 6.9 Any resident animal displaying signs of illness shall be isolated and examined by a veterinarian.

7. Outbreaks or ongoing micro-organisms transmission

- 7.1 When there is known, suspected or ongoing micro-organism transmission, IPC may make additional recommendations for restricting animal visitation in healthcare.
- 7.2 A separate environment is provided for resident/facility pets during outbreaks to restrict the animal. One-to-one visits with non-affected residents may be permitted in consultation with the care team and IPC.

Definitions

Pet means an animal kept for pleasure or companionship.

Personal or visiting animal means an animal or pet who visits the facility on an ad hoc basis or limited time frame to provide comfort to a person in a healthcare facility. Also called animal visitation.

Resident/facility animal means an animal or pet that lives in the healthcare facility on a permanent basis. Care of the resident/facility pet is the responsibility of an identified person (staff or volunteer) working at the healthcare facility.

Pet Therapy/Animal-Assisted Therapy means the use of trained animals and handlers to achieve specific therapeutic goals. May also referred to as animal assisted activities.

Service Animals means any animal that assists a person with disabilities with one or more daily activities. A service animal is not considered a pet. Rules regarding service animals in healthcare facilities are found in the Alberta Service Dog Act and Alberta Blind Person’s Rights Act.

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Domesticated animal means to adapt an animal to life in intimate association with and to the advantage of humans. An animal that is not wild and is kept as a pet.

Zoonosis means any infectious disease that can be transmitted from non-human animals, both wild and domestic, to humans. Also referred to as animal-human disease transmission.

References

1. AJIC Guidelines for Animal-assisted Interventions in Healthcare Facilities. March 2008 Volume 38 Number 2.
2. AVMA (n.d) Wellness Guidelines for Animals in Animal-Assisted Activity, Animal-Assisted Therapy and Resident Animal Programs retrieved from <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/avma-policies/animal-assisted-interventions-guidelines>.
3. Jefferson, J. (2009). *Animals Visiting Healthcare Facilities* In APIC text of Infection Control and Epidemiology 3rd edition. 68 1-8.
4. Lefebvre et al, when animals visit patients, reducing the risk, Vol 1 No 1 Spring 2008.
5. Lefebvre et al Incidence of Acquisition of Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus, Clostridium difficile, and Other Health-care-associated Pathogens by Dogs that Participate in Animal-assisted Interventions JAVMA Vol 234, No. 11, June 1, 2009.

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