

Biosecurity Basics: Agritourism

Biosecurity on the farm is an essential step to keeping your animals healthy and starts with a few key actions. This presentation will address biosecurity tips for operations that have public visitors.

Agritourism can provide exciting attractions, public education, and added income to farms and ranches. Animals can be a fun part of the tour. Keeping your animals and visitors healthy can happen with some simple biosecurity actions. Key areas to address are health risks to animals as well as health risk to those visiting, prevention practices when public interaction with the animals is allowed, as well as the importance of hand washing stations in or near animals areas and food locations. A printable PDF containing the tips presented here is available for free download on the CFSPH website.

First let's look at health risks to animals

Visitors to your operation can come from various locations. Healthy individuals coming from areas without poultry or livestock will be lower risk to your animals. Of greater concern are guests that come from other animal operations, have recently travelled internationally, or who have health issues, such as compromised immune systems.

Although minimizing visitor contact with animals would result in the lowest risk, it is not feasible for most agritourism businesses. For agritourism operations that include animal interactions, some precautions that can be taken include: provide a guest sign-in sheet to log all visitors, place hand sanitizers at the entrance for visitors to use before entering.

Place signs at the entrance and in visiting areas. Signs should provide farm instructions to visitors, such as directing them to wash hands following contact with animals. Areas that are not open to the public should also be clearly marked with signs.

Visitors should have clearly marked tour routes or be led by your staff. With the exception of service animals, guests should not bring their own pets to the property. This protects the animals on your farm or ranch from potential illness or unintended injury.

Without precautions in place, there can also be health risks to people.

While you work to maintain the health of your animals, it is important to remember there can be health risks to your guests. Zoonotic diseases are illnesses caused by many different organisms, including bacteria, viruses, parasites, and fungi that come from animals and can make people sick. Examples include *Cryptosporidia*, *Campylobacter*, *E. coli*, and *Salmonella*.

Age, immune status, and certain health conditions put some people at greater risk of becoming ill from a disease transmitted by animals. People at increased risk include: Children, especially under the age of 5; People with chronic health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer, etc.; Adults age 65 and older; and Pregnant women

Animals should be observed daily to check for signs of illness before guests arrive. If any animals appear to be sick, remove them from public areas and isolate them from other animals. When appropriate, provide treatment according to the protocol you have developed with your veterinarian. If you have questions or concerns about the health of your animal, be sure to consult with your veterinarian.

Regularly clean and disinfect animal areas. This prevents build-up of manure and potential disease-causing germs. If manure, bedding or other waste material is moved out of animal areas, avoid public areas where guests walk.

Keep all exhibited animals current on recommended vaccinations. Work with your veterinarian to schedule regular preventive care as well as to examine animals that do not respond to treatment protocols established with your veterinarian or require immediate attention. If an animal appears ill with an infectious disease, it should be isolated right away.

If dogs, cats, or other farm animals are part of the operation's experience for guests, make sure they are also healthy. Keep them current on vaccines, and on a parasite prevention program.

Young animals have immature immune systems and fragile bodies. Do not allow guests to handle newborn and very young animals. This helps prevent injuries and illness in animals and protects humans from diseases that could be spread by young animals. In areas where guests can touch animals, staff should be present to ensure animals are handled safely. It is also important to frequently clean high contact surfaces in public areas (e.g., railings, gates, door handles) to prevent germs from spreading.

Post signs reminding adults to supervise children and to thoroughly wash hands after animal contact.

If the operation has a petting zoo where animals can be fed by guests, only allow animals to be given feed that you provide. Feed should be appropriate for the types of animals eating it.

One way to help minimize exposure of the public to potential disease risks is by establishing the movement flow of visitors on your farm. If possible, groups visiting animal areas should move in one direction only, from entry to exit. This is to avoid spreading germs from non-animal areas into animal areas. Upon entry, signs can be posted to share important information. Prohibiting personal belongings into animal areas, such as strollers, pacifiers, cups, toys, bottles, etc. should be encouraged, since these items can become contaminated with germs from animals. Areas designated for strollers and other items that cannot enter can be established.

After people move through the animal area, it is again important to post signs, encouraging hand washing. And whenever possible have sinks, soap and running water, or at a minimum portable hand washing or sanitizing stations.

If food or beverages are provided for guests, they should be prepared, served, and consumed in areas that are separate from where animals are kept.

Hand washing stations or hand cleaners/sanitizers should be available in concession areas. This is especially important if "finger foods" will be served to guests.

Protect guests from getting food-borne illnesses. All food should be handled, prepared, and stored according to state and local health department guidelines.

Using the following assessment checklist, determine areas where you are already doing well and others that may need to improve.

Do you have barriers in place to limit contact between animals and visitors?

Do you provide gloves or a hand washing station with running water, soap, and towels for visitors?

Do you have signs posted that promote handwashing before and after animal contact?

Is human food prohibited in animal areas?

After answering, pick one or two “No” answers and make an improvement plan.

Development of this material was made possible through a grant provided to the Center for Food Security and Public Health at Iowa State University, College of Veterinary Medicine from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) through the North Central Region SARE program