

Stay Healthy at Animal Exhibits

On a recent trip to see my grandson, five family members enjoyed an outing to the Memphis Zoo. With county fairs coming up this month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reminds us that interacting with animals at fairs, zoos, and aquariums can be educational and fun, but it's important to remember that animals sometimes carry harmful germs that can make us sick.

Every year, many people get sick after visiting an animal exhibit. From 2010-2015, about 100 outbreaks of illness in people linked to animals in public settings like zoos, fairs, and educational farms were reported to public health officials. Some of the most common harmful germs people get from animals at exhibits are *E. coli* O157:H7, *Cryptosporidium*, and *Salmonella* infections.

If you forget to wash your hands after petting an animal, or bring food or drinks into an area with animals, you increase your chance of getting sick. Adults over 65 years of age, children 5 years of age and younger, and people with weakened immune systems are more likely to get sick from the germs animals can carry, and should take extra precautions at animal exhibits.

Handwashing is important. Remember to wash your hands right after petting animals and when you leave animal areas, even if you did not touch an animal. Running water and soap are best. If running water and soap are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Wash your hands with soap and water as soon as a sink is available.

Eat and drink safely. Keep food and drinks out of animal areas. Don't prepare, serve, or eat food in animal areas (with the exception of service animals, or animals that assist people with disabilities). Remember to wash your hands before preparing food or drinks and before eating and drinking.

Children always need adult supervision around animals. Do not take or use strollers, bottles, pacifiers, spill-proof cups, or toys into animal areas.