

## Guidelines for Pets in Facilities – Long-term Care and Retirement Homes

### Animal visitation program - Zoonotic diseases risk reduction background

Animal visitation programs have been found to benefit people socially, psychologically and physiologically<sup>1</sup>. Pet visitation and pet therapy programs, while important for the health and well-being of those accessing the programs, may increase the risk of infectious disease transmission. Those who have the greatest health risk are the elderly, immunocompromised, pregnant women and children under five years of age.

The health risk can be minimized with proper animal handling, appropriate restrictions and cleaning practices. Improper pet care, handling and hand hygiene, including improper disposal of pet waste and improper use of kitchen sinks for animal care,<sup>2</sup> are key risk factors for the majority of pet-associated infections .

York Region Public Health provides the following *Guidelines for Pets in Facilities – Long-term Care and Retirement Homes* to facility operators to mitigate the risk of transmitting zoonotic microorganisms from animals to residents<sup>3</sup>. All long-term care homes in Ontario must have a policy respecting pets<sup>4</sup>.

### Choose appropriate animals

Facilities should screen animals that will reside in facilities and visit residents on the following basis:

- Screen out high health risk animals, such as reptiles, spiders and amphibians because they shed proportionately more disease causing agents.
- Ensure animals have up-to-date rabies vaccinations. Keep a record of the vaccination status on-site.
- Animals should have annual check-ups to ensure they are healthy and should not exhibit any signs of illness. If animals have any of the following they cannot visit residents: Urinary or fecal incontinence, open wounds, ear or skin infections, flea or tick infestations, or signs of distress.
- Select animals with known behaviours. Animals should be in their owner's home for at least six months. Screen animals by age appropriateness and temperament. Animals should not exhibit negative, aggressive or fearful behaviour. Cats and dogs should be at least one year old to ensure that they have completed all vaccinations and they should not be pregnant when visiting residents to avoid a higher risk of scratches and bites.
- Animals displaying inappropriate behaviour should be removed from the home and visiting privileges should be revoked.
- Visiting animals should be bathed and groomed with nails trimmed.

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<sup>1</sup> Guidance Document for the Management of Animals in Child Care Centres. Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, May 2016. Accessed from [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph\\_standards/docs/guidance/mgt\\_animals\\_child\\_care\\_centres\\_gd.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/guidance/mgt_animals_child_care_centres_gd.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Recommendations to Prevent Disease and Injury Associated with Petting Zoos in Ontario, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, February 27, 2011

<sup>3</sup> Guidelines for Animal-assisted Interventions in Health Care Facilities Lefebvre S, Golab G, Christensen E, Castrodale et al. AJIC., March 2008; 36(2): 78-85.

<sup>4</sup> Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007 and Regulation 79/10, Section 93. Accessed from <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/100079>

### Restricted access

Facilities should ensure that animals and their cleaning products are restricted to reduce the spread of disease and to promote the health and well-being of the animal.

- Hand hygiene is essential for all residents, staff and animal handlers. Proper hand hygiene should be performed both before and after contact with animals. Facilities should ensure handwashing stations are in close proximity to where animals are being handled, and that there is an adequate supply of liquid soap with paper towels or alcohol-based hand sanitizer stations.
- Animals and dwellings must not be located in food preparation or storage areas, dining areas, laundry, sterile and clean storage areas to avoid infectious disease contamination.
- Animals should not be allowed in chemical storage or medication areas for their safety.
- Facility staff must take every reasonable and practical effort to keep animals away from residents and staff with allergies, phobias or dislikes. Residents who do not wish to have contact with animals shall have documentation in their care plans and/or signage on the door to their rooms.
- **Animal visits should have the following restrictions:**
  - Limit an animal's visit to one hour or less in the facility to reduce animal fatigue
  - Keep animals on a leash or in a pet carrier
  - Supervise animals and prevent them from having contact with: Residents' invasive devices, open wounds, bandages, and food; ill residents; and take any other additional precautions as advised by staff and residents
  - Discourage animals from lying on residents' beds unless there is an impermeable mattress barrier
  - Discourage residents from feeding food treats to animals. Animals should be discouraged from licking residents' skin. If an animal licks a resident, ensure the resident's skin is washed and hand hygiene is performed.
  - Prohibit visits during an infectious disease outbreak at a facility until the outbreak is declared over.

### Incidents with animals

- In the event that a resident or staff member is exposed to the saliva of an animal through a bite or scratch, animal supervisors must immediately remove the animal from the facility and inform facility staff.
- Facility staff should ensure that the affected area is washed with soap and water and medical attention should be sought.
- The facility is responsible for documenting the incident including details and first aid practices followed.
- **Facilities must report all incidents of animal bites and scratches where exposure to the animal's saliva was a possibility to York Region Public Health 1-800-361-5653 TTY 1-866-512-6228.**
- The facility should inform the resident's family member(s) about the incident.

### Caring and feeding of animals

Facilities should have a pet care plan which identifies who is responsible for the animal's daily requirements (feeding, exercise, cage/litter box cleaning), daily health screening, bathing and grooming.

- Facilities must be able to produce documentation verifying that mammals (dogs, cats) have had annual veterinarian check-ups, rabies vaccinations are up-to-date, and are healthy.
- The veterinarian's contact information and health records should be included and readily available to staff in case of a bite or animal illness.



- A sick animal should be promptly removed from the facility (i.e. if it has vomiting or diarrhea episodes, sneezes or coughs for unknown reasons, displays unusual or stressful behaviours, or the illness is suspected to be infectious in origin). Animals may return to the facility after symptoms have resolved for one week.
- Birds must be kept in a cage at all times and should have their wings clipped to limit flight/movement to control bird droppings.
- Animals should be fed only commercially prepared food and treats. Live insects and animals, raw meat and poultry should not be fed to animals to avoid the spread of infectious diseases.
- Animal food containers and food bags should not be stored on the floor or in areas where human food is stored, prepared or served.
- Animals should have access to fresh, clean water and must not be allowed to drink out of toilets.
- Animals should be bathed in a utility sink when they are visibly soiled. Animals must not be bathed in a sink used for food or water.

### **Cleaning animal dwellings**

- Residents should not be in close proximity during the cleaning of animal dwellings and should not be involved in cleaning and disinfecting animal dwellings.
- Designated facility staff should clean cages, dog beds, litter boxes, fish tanks, bird cages and other animal dwellings regularly and document the activity.
- Staff who clean animal dwellings should not provide direct resident care. If so, staff should wear personal protective equipment, change clothes and perform proper hand hygiene prior to interacting with residents.
- Surfaces contaminated by animal urine, feces, vomit and/or blood must be cleaned and disinfected by staff wearing gloves and personal protective equipment as required. Surface contamination should be removed with paper towels and disposed of in the garbage. The surface should be cleaned with soap and water and then disinfected and rinsed, according to manufacturers' instructions. (See the Pet Care – Cage and Crate Cleaning Instruction poster)
- Sinks used for food preparation or obtaining drinking water must not be used for cleaning animal items. Utility sinks should be used for cleaning animal enclosures and related items.
- Additional cleaning and disinfecting precautions should be taken when cleaning and disinfecting bird cages, fish tanks and litter boxes. Ensure there are staff resources to provide this additional duty of animal care.
  - Bird cages should be cleaned and disinfected on a regular basis to ensure fecal matter does not dry up, accumulate and become airborne. Reduce the risk of psittacosis, a respiratory disease which is spread to humans when they inhale dust from dried bird droppings, bird secretions and feathers of infected birds. Staff cleaning bird cages should wear an N95 face mask when there is a risk that airborne dust and particulate will be generated. (See [Psittacosis](#) symptoms and prevention fact sheet.)
  - Litter boxes should be cleaned daily, using gloves and a scoop to remove clumps formed from urine or feces. Pregnant staff should not clean or handle the litter box due to the risk of acquiring a toxoplasmosis infection.



## Cleaning and disinfecting animal enclosures – Sample Procedure

Facility operators are encouraged to post written procedures and/or a poster to remind staff of proper cleaning and disinfecting procedures<sup>5</sup>.

### 1. Prepare to clean

- Wash hands, put on gloves and other protective equipment, as needed
- Follow extra precautions for cleaning bird cage (i.e. wear N95 mask and keep residents away from cage cleaning)
- Pregnant women should not handle litter boxes

### 2. Clean pet items and cage

- Remove pets, bedding, toys, food and water dishes from the cage
- Dispose of food, droppings and bedding material in a garbage bag
- Use utility sinks (not kitchen sinks) to clean bowls, toys, and cage surfaces. Use soap and a scrub brush and then rinse with water
- Launder bedding and towels

### 3. Disinfect pet items and cage

- Apply disinfectant\* to items that have been cleaned
- Rinse disinfected items and dry them
- Clean and disinfect cleaning sink
- Remove gloves and wash hands

### 4. Re-make your pet's home

- Add new food and fresh water to cleaned bowls
- Return clean bedding and toys to cage
- Complete cleaning log and schedule next cleaning

\* Additional infection control precautions that must be taken when cleaning bird cages.

\*\* The disinfectant chosen should be suitable for use on surfaces or objects in animal dwellings and should have a drug identification number (DIN). Cleaners should follow manufacturer's instructions for mixing, contact time and application. If bleach is used, a 1:100 (500 ppm) concentration is required. This concentration can be achieved by mixing 10mL of bleach with 1L of water. Bleach should remain wet on the surface for five minutes.

Refer to ***Pet Care – Cage and Crate Cleaning poster eDOCS#7835799***

This material is provided by York Region Public Health. Please visit [.york.ca](http://york.ca) or call Public Health - Health Connection at 1-866-361-5653 TTY 1-866-512-6228.

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<sup>5</sup> Resident Pets, Personal Family/Friends Pets, Pet Visitation and Pet Therapy Program – Long Term Care, Infection Prevention and Control Policies and Procedures, #50-50, Saskatoon Health Region, September 2010. Accessed from <https://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/about/IPCpolicies/50-50.pdf> on October 19/16.

