



# Hardfacts

Norwich Union Risk Services

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## Handling Animals Safely

This Hardfacts sheet provides general advice on the safe handling of animals in a variety of situations such as Boarding kennels, catteries, dog grooming parlours, etc.

### The Law

Where people are employed in animal handling the general requirements of the Health & Safety at Work Act, 1974 apply, along with the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, 1999, the Manual Handling Regulations, 1992 and Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations, 2002 (as amended). These sets of Regulations require that the risks arising from work activities are subjected to an assessment and are controlled so far as reasonably practicable.

### The risks

Handling animals always involves a risk of injury. The risk is increased if the animals have not been handled frequently. Certain jobs such as veterinary work, may increase the risk further. However, with proper handling systems, trained and competent staff can help to ensure that handling can be carried out in relative safety. The risks should never be underestimated even with good precautions in place.

### Risk Assessment

Factors to be considered in animal handling

- The person - including mental and physical abilities, training and experience
- The equipment available - cages, kennels, pens, poles, leads
- The animal - including how familiar it is with being handled and it's health.

**The person** - everyone handling animals should be:

- Able to use the handling equipment and other safety equipment provided

- Aware of the dangers when handling animals and be supervised until they are competent
- Able to work calmly with animals, with the minimum of shouting, impatience or unnecessary force;
- In good health and properly trained in work methods.

Some work with animals may need two people - always assess the need for help before beginning the task.

### The equipment

Proper handling facilities should be provided for the types of animals handled, which are well maintained and in good order. Makeshift solutions are not sufficient, and will result in less efficient handling as well as risking injury. The use of gloves or other protective clothing and various restraining devices or cages can assist in reducing the risk of injury where appropriate. Before beginning work on any animal, check that it is adequately restrained.

### The animal

Many animals being handled will be familiar with the process. Where animals are unfamiliar with the noises, activity and personnel involved, allow them to become accustomed to them before commencing.

If you have an animal that is habitually aggressive or difficult to handle, review whether the procedure is necessary or not and consider alternative methods.

### Occupational Health Risks

There are several possible occupational diseases and infections that can be transmitted to persons working with or coming into contact with animals. The risk is increased in the case of sick animals that are known to spread more infectious diseases than usual. Such diseases are termed zoonotic disease i.e. they are spread from animals to man. Species of animals affected include cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, horses, poultry, deer, rodents, badgers, any other wild animal or bird and any domestic pet including terrapins and tortoises.

It should be remembered that the zoonotic diseases are rare, but individuals working with animals should be aware of the risks and take necessary preventive measures to prevent or reduce these risks however small.

Anyone suspecting a zoonotic disease or infection should consult their GP as soon as possible.

There are several ways in which these diseases can be contracted. Generally via inhalation, ingestion, cuts and abrasions, skin punctures, bites and surface contact with animals or structures.

Never ignore and always suspect any symptoms or lesions such as: - 'Flu-like' (fevers); chills, sweats, fatigue & depressions; unexplained weight losses; gastrointestinal upsets e.g. Diarrhoea, nausea, sickness; muscle aches and stiffness; muscle spasms; hydrophobia; jaundice; conjunctivitis, fits; septic lesions; skin rashes, etc.; and any respiratory problems.

Female workers who become pregnant should inform their doctor that they work with animals.

#### **Good Husbandry and Housekeeping**

Sick animals should be segregated or isolated and treated with caution.

#### **Personal Hygiene**

Personal hygiene should be of a high standard at all times. All exposed parts of the body should be thoroughly washed and dried before eating drinking or smoking.

Keep all cuts, abrasions, etc. clean and dry and covered by a suitable waterproof dressing. If possible change clothing before and after work.

#### **Protective Clothing**

Protective clothing should be worn especially when handling sick or infected animals.

Waterproof aprons, gloves and boots should be thoroughly washed and disinfected after use.

#### **Infected material**

Arrangements should be made for the safe disposal of infected material.

#### **Immunisations**

Staff working with animals should be required to obtain a tetanus injection with boosters at the appropriate intervals.

#### **Key Action Steps**

- Ensure adequate risk assessments have been completed
- Ensure staff training is provided
- Provide suitable equipment and enclosures
- Ensure good standards of personal hygiene
- Monitor staff for any ill health effects

#### **References**

- Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 The Stationery Office
- Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations, 1999 Approved Code of Practice & Guidance L21 2000 HSE Books
- Manual Handling Operations Regulations, 1992 Guidance on Regulations L23 2004 HSE Books
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (as amended) Approved Code of Practice & Guidance L5 2005 HSE Books
- The Occupational Zoonoses 1992 HSE Books

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Norwich Union Risk Services operates a Risk Helpline during normal business hours for the cost of a local telephone call. The telephone number is:

**0845 366 66 66**

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