

Loss Prevention Standards

Handling Animals Safely

Introduction

This guide provides general advice on the safe handling of animals in a variety of situations such as boarding kennels, catteries, dog grooming salons, pet shops, colleges, farms, horse-riding establishments, stables, etc.

The Risks

Handling animals always involves a risk of injury or ill health, and the risk is increased if the animals have not been handled frequently and are unsure of human contact. Certain tasks such as veterinary work may increase the risk further. However, proper handling systems together with trained and competent staff can help to ensure that animal 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 include the:

- **Person** - including mental and physical abilities, training and experience
- **Equipment** - cages, kennels, pens, poles, leads
- **Animal** - including how familiar it is with being handled, its health and the likelihood of the animal or breed to react badly to being handled

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 and confidently 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 so always assess the need for help before beginning the task.

The Equipment

Proper handling facilities should be provided for the types of animals handled. Such facilities should be well maintained and in good order. Makeshift solutions are not sufficient and will result in less efficient handling as well as increasing the risk of 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 starting 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, they should be allowed to become accustomed to them before commencing. If an animal is habitually aggressive or difficult to handle, review whether the procedure is necessary or not, and consider alternative methods.

Other Hazards

Lifting and handling of heavy items such as bags of feed, bedding materials and the movement of animals may pose a risk of injury. Staff training must include the principles of lifting and carrying heavy objects in order to avoid the risk of musculoskeletal injury. Mechanical hoists or lifts may be necessary to move large animals. Hazards associated with chemical substances, e.g. cleaning agents and veterinary drugs used in conjunction with animal work should be the subject of a specific recorded assessment, detailing the nature of the hazards present and the precautions necessary.

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. Such diseases are termed zoonotic diseases, i.e. they are spread from animals to man. Species of animals affected include most mammals, birds and reptiles. In some cases the animal is simply a carrier of the disease but the risk is increased in the case of sick animals that are infectious.

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

[Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\) Website: Zoonoses](#)

Immunisations

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

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

Female workers who become pregnant should inform their General Practitioner (GP) that they work with animals, as they may be required to withdraw from such work during the course of the pregnancy.

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.

All cuts, abrasions, etc. should be kept clean and dry, and covered by a suitable waterproof dressing. If possible, clothing should be changed 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.

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 Operations 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 controlled so far as reasonably practicable.

Key Action Steps

- Ensure adequate risk assessments have been completed and safe systems of work established
- Ensure staff training is provided
- Anyone suspecting a zoonotic disease or infection should consult their GP as soon as possible
- Provide suitable equipment and enclosures
- Ensure good standards of personal hygiene
- Monitor staff for any ill-health effects

Additional Information

- [Manual Handling - Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 - Guidance on Regulations](#)
- [Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002](#)
- [HSE Guidance - Livestock](#)
- [Managing Health and Safety in Zoos - HSG219](#)

Further risk management information can be obtained from [Aviva Risk Management Solutions](#)

Please Note

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