



# Wyoming Department of Education

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## MEMORANDUM NO. 2007-032

**TO:** School District Superintendents  
Principals

**FROM:** Gerald Maas, Ph.D. *gm*  
Director, Health and Safety Unit

**DATE:** January 26, 2007

**SUBJECT:** *Guidelines for Visiting and Resident Animals in Wyoming Schools*

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### IMPORTANT INFORMATION—PLEASE CIRCULATE

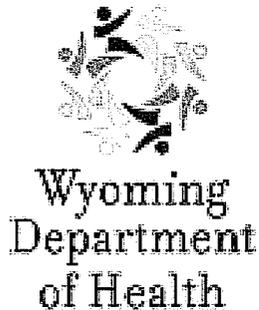
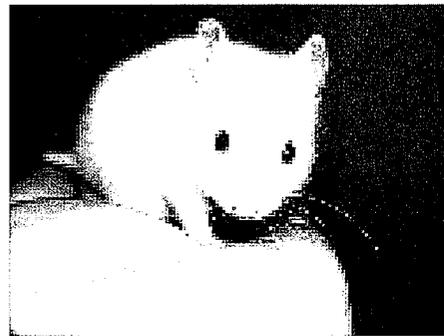
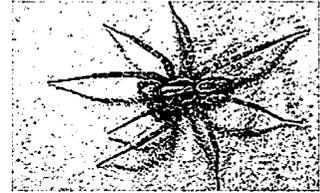
The Wyoming Department of Health and the Wyoming Department of Education are sending you a copy of the publication, *Guidelines for Visiting and Resident Animals in Wyoming Schools*. Please circulate this publication as you deem appropriate.

You may contact the Wyoming Department of Health, Preventive Health and Safety section, at the address, telephone or fax numbers indicated on the publication if you have any questions about the Guidelines.

GM:gm

Attachment

# Guidelines for Visiting and Resident Animals in Wyoming Schools



*Commit to your health.*



*One Team One Effort*

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# Guidelines for Visiting and Resident Animals in Wyoming Schools

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Acknowledgments: This document was adapted from guidelines developed by the Alabama Department of Health

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## GUIDELINES FOR VISITING AND RESIDENT ANIMALS IN WYOMING SCHOOLS

### INTRODUCTION

These are guidelines the Wyoming Department of Health and the Wyoming Department of Education suggest schools follow to protect students and instructors from the possible health risks associated with animal contact. These guidelines provide recommendations to promote safety for instructors and students when animals are brought into the classroom. Animals are part of our daily lives, they can be used effectively as teaching aids, and the positive benefits of the human-animal bond are well established. However, the special situation of classrooms necessitates certain safeguards.

Inadequate understanding of animal disease and behavior can lead to unnecessary risks for children and animals alike. These guidelines are designed to promote a better understanding of:

1. Which animals may represent a health hazard and are not safe to bring into classrooms at all.
2. Health considerations when handling animals that have the potential to transmit disease.
3. Safety precautions for introducing animals into classrooms.
4. How to properly handle animal wastes to limit the spread of disease from animals to humans.

### ANIMALS THAT ARE UNACCEPTABLE FOR SCHOOL VISITS

#### 1. Wild Animals

Defining a wild animal is difficult and subjective. For the purposes of these guidelines, a wild animal is any *mammal* that is **NOT** one of the following:

- a. Domestic dog
- b. Domestic cat
- c. Domestic ferret
- d. Domestic ungulate (e.g., cow, sheep, goat, pig, horse)
- e. Pet rabbit (domestic/not wild born)
- f. Pet or lab rodents (domestic/not wild born--e.g., mice, rats, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, chinchillas)

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Wild animals pose a risk for transmitting rabies as well as other *zoonotic diseases* (i.e., diseases which can be transferred from animals to humans) and should never be brought into schools or handled by children.

Wild animals' behavior also tends to be unpredictable. A wild animal that has been raised in captivity is still a wild animal. Domestication takes thousands of years, not just a generation or two.

Exceptions to this recommendation include those instances when the wild animals are presented at schools by a professional who has experience handling wildlife and are displayed in enclosed cages which prevent contact between the animal and children. *Because of the high incidence of rabies in bats, raccoons, skunks, and wild carnivores, these animals (including recently dead animals) should not be permitted on school grounds under any circumstances.*

**2. Poisonous Animals**

Spiders, venomous insects, poisonous reptiles (including snakes), and poisonous amphibians should be prohibited from being brought onto school grounds.

Exceptions to this recommendation include those instances when these animals are presented at schools by a professional who has experience handling them and are displayed in cases which provide a physical barrier between the animal and the children (e.g., animal is enclosed behind sturdy glass or plastic).

**3. Wolf-dog hybrids**

These animals are crosses between a wolf and a domestic dog and have shown a propensity for aggression, especially toward young children. Therefore, they should not be allowed on school grounds.

**4. Stray animals**

Stray animals should never be brought onto school grounds because the health and vaccination status of these animals is unknown.

**5. Aggressive animals**

Animals which are bred or trained to demonstrate aggression towards humans or other animals, or animals which have demonstrated such aggressive behavior in the past, should not be permitted on school grounds. Aggressive, unprovoked, or threatening behavior should mandate the animal's immediate removal.

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Exceptions may be sentry or canine corps dogs for demonstration that are under the control of trained military or law enforcement officials.

**SPECIAL CONDITIONS FOR SPECIFIC ANIMALS**

Specific recommendations should be observed for the following animals because of zoonotic diseases that they may carry or because of certain tendencies:

1. **Reptiles (including non-poisonous snakes, lizards, and iguanas) and amphibians**  
Because of the high risk of salmonellosis from these animals even when reared in captivity, special precautions are necessary when handling the animals. These animals may intermittently shed salmonella, and negative cultures will not guarantee that they are not infected. Treatment of infected animals with antibiotics has not proven useful and may promote the development and spread of resistant bacteria.

It is recommended that when reptiles or amphibians are present at schools, they should be under the direct responsibility of professionals (including teachers) that have training and experience handling them. The animals should be kept and displayed in cases which provide a physical barrier between the animal and the children (e.g., sturdy glass or plastic).

Because salmonellosis can be more severe in young children and because their hygiene practices are more questionable, handling of reptiles and amphibians is not recommended for children younger than five years. **Any time children are allowed to handle these animals, they should receive very clear instructions on how to wash their hands thoroughly after they finish.** Instructions on hand washing are in the appendix.

2. **Baby chicks and ducks**  
Because of the high risk of salmonellosis and campylobacteriosis from these animals, they are inappropriate for children under the age of five. Transmission of these diseases from chicks and ducklings to children is well documented in medical literature. It is recommended that all student contact with baby ducks and chicks takes place under the direct supervision of an instructor. The instructor should discourage all hand-to-mouth activity and give **very clear instructions to students on how to wash their hands thoroughly after they finish handling the animals.** Instructions on hand washing are in the appendix. Students should also be well educated about the risks associated with these animals.

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**3. Psittacine birds**

Because psittacine birds can carry zoonotic diseases such as psittacosis (*Chlamydia psittaci*, parrot fever), children are discouraged from handling such birds (parrots, parakeets, budgies, and cockatiels). Birds showing any signs of illness should not be brought into school. Psittacine birds may be brought to school as long as their cages are clean and the bird's wastes can be contained, such as within a cage. Psittacine birds permanently housed on school property in cages should be treated prophylactically, under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian, with appropriate tetracyclines for psittacosis for 45 days prior to entering the premises.

**4. Ferrets**

Ferrets can be allowed to visit school classrooms, but they must be handled by the person responsible for them. Because of their propensity to bite when startled, it is not recommended that school children hold ferrets visiting the classroom.

**5. Fish**

Disposable gloves should be worn when cleaning aquariums. Used tank water should be disposed of in sinks that are not used for food preparation or for obtaining water for human consumption.

**6. Guide, hearing, and other service animals and law enforcement animals**

These animals should not be prohibited from being on school grounds or in classrooms, provided all pertinent recommendations mentioned elsewhere in this document are followed.

**SUGGESTED ANIMALS FOR USE IN SCHOOLS**

Some animals are more appropriate than others for use in schools. The following is a list of animals that may be more appropriate:

1. Small pet or lab rodents (domestic/not wild born--e.g., mice, rats, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, chinchillas)
2. Pet rabbits (domestic/not wild born)
3. Aquarium fish (salt or fresh water)
4. Non-psittacine cage and aviary birds (e.g., canaries, finches, mynahs, diamond doves)

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All animals housed in schools should be provided an appropriate environment (e.g., secure housing, suitable temperature, adequate exercise) and a proper diet. In addition, there should be a plan for the continued care of these animals during the days that school is not in session. Consultation with a veterinarian is advised to help with environmental and nutritional needs and to provide care in the event of illness or injury to the animal.

**GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR ANIMALS THAT ARE PERMITTED TO VISIT SCHOOLS**

It is important that animals brought onto school grounds are clean and healthy to decrease the risk of transmitting disease. Children tend to be more susceptible to zoonotic and parasitic infections than adults because of their lack of hand washing and greater propensity for putting their hands in their mouths. Therefore, animals that are brought to school should be clean and free of disease and external parasites such as fleas, ticks and mites, to decrease the likelihood of the animal transmitting these agents or vectors to the students. Visiting animals should be restricted to an area designated by the principal or administrator. Kittens and puppies (over three months of age and properly vaccinated for rabies) are appropriate only for short classroom visits.

The following are specific recommendations for some common visiting animals:

**1. Verified rabies vaccination**

Current rabies vaccination by a licensed veterinarian must be documented for all dogs, cats, and ferrets brought onto school property for any reason. Dogs and cats under three months of age should not be allowed on school property (because of their lack of valid rabies vaccination).

**2. Health certificates for dogs**

A health certificate signed by a licensed veterinarian showing proof of current annual physical exam is required for any dog entering school property. Vaccinations as the licensed veterinarian deems appropriate (recommendations include canine distemper, canine hepatitis, leptospirosis, parainfluenza and bordetella) and a negative fecal exam or proof of successful treatment for internal parasites (if it is recommended by the veterinarian) are also required. The animal should also be free of external parasites such as fleas, ticks, and mites and free of obvious skin lesions. Dogs over four months of age should be housebroken.

**3. Health certificates for cats**

A health certificate signed by a licensed veterinarian showing proof of current annual physical exam and vaccinations as the licensed veterinarian deems appropriate (recommendations include feline panleukopenia (feline distemper), rhinotracheitis, calicivirus, chlamydia, feline leukemia) is required. A negative fecal exam or proof of

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successful treatment for internal parasites is required if it is recommended by the veterinarian. Cats should be free of external parasites (such as fleas, ticks, and mites) and free of obvious skin lesions.

**4. Health certificates for ferrets**

A health certificate signed by a licensed veterinarian showing proof of current annual physical exam and vaccinations as the licensed veterinarian deems appropriate is required along with a negative fecal exam or proof of successful treatment for internal parasites if it is recommended by the veterinarian. Ferrets should be free of external parasites such as fleas, ticks, and mites and free of obvious skin lesions.

**PROPER RESTRAINT OF ANIMALS**

Because animals may react strangely to classroom situations, it is important to have an effective way to control them. Fear may cause animals to attempt to escape or even act aggressively in situations which are unusual to them (the "flight or fight" phenomenon). Appropriate restraint devices will allow the holder to react quickly and prevent harm to students or escape of the animal.

**1. Collars and leashes**

Dogs, cats, and ferrets should be wearing a proper collar, harness, and/or leash when on the school campus or in the classroom so they can be easily controlled. Household rope or string is not an appropriate restraint tool. The owner or responsible person should stay with the animal during its visit to the school. No animal should be allowed to roam unrestrained on the school grounds or in the classroom.

**2. Pet birds**

Pet birds should never be allowed to fly free in a classroom.

**3. Designated areas**

All animals should be restricted to the area designated by the principal or administrator. In school facilities in which the common dining area is also used as an auditorium, gymnasium or multi-purpose room, animals may be allowed in the area **at times other than meals if:**

- a. Effective partitioning or self-closing doors separate the area from food storage and food preparation areas.
- b. Condiments, equipment, and utensils are stored in enclosed cabinets or removed from the area when animals are present.

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- c. Dining areas, including tables, countertops, and similar surfaces, are effectively cleaned before the next meal service. Cleaning should be done with a 10% bleach solution or commercial disinfectant. Animals should **not** be in dining areas during mealtimes.

**4. Estrus**

Female dogs and cats should be determined not to be in estrus (heat) at the time of the visit.

**STUDENT CONTACT WITH ANIMALS**

Increased activity and sudden movements can make animals feel threatened, so all student contact with animals should always be supervised and conform to a few basic rules. Even very tame animals may act aggressively in strange situations.

1. Animal bites can usually be avoided if students are kept in small groups.
2. Rough play or teasing should absolutely not be allowed.
3. Children should not be allowed to feed pets directly from their hands.
4. Small animals such as rabbits, hamsters, gerbils, and mice should be handled very gently.
  - Rabbits rarely like to be held and will struggle to free themselves.
  - Rodents may bite when they feel threatened, but rabies postexposure prophylaxis is almost never warranted with small rodent bites.
5. Children should be discouraged from “kissing” animals or having them in close contact with their faces.
6. Education with animals should be used to reemphasize proper hygiene and hand-washing recommendations. All children who handle animals should be instructed to wash their hands immediately after handling them.

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7. Animals should not be allowed in the vicinity of sinks or fixtures where children get drinks or wash their hands, or in any areas where food is prepared, stored, or served. Animals should not be kept in areas used for cleaning or storage of food utensils or dishes. Animals should also be restricted from nursing stations or sterile and clean supply rooms.
8. Do not allow cats or dogs in sand boxes where children play.
9. Students with animal allergies are not uncommon. Therefore, all students should have parental documentation stating that they do not have animal allergies. This can be accomplished by having parents sign a release form at the beginning of each school year. (A sample release form can be found in the appendix; however, the Wyoming Departments of Health and Education do not certify that this is a legal document. Legal counsel may be desired.)
10. Immunocompromised students (e.g., children with organ transplants, children currently receiving cancer chemotherapy or radiation therapy) may be especially susceptible to zoonotic diseases; therefore, special precautions may be needed to minimize the risk of disease transmission to these students. Consultation with the child's parents about precautionary measures is strongly advised. Recommendations for specific precautionary measures may also be solicited from the Wyoming Department of Health, Preventive Health and Safety Division (307-777-7172).
11. In the event of an animal bite, the local or state health department should be contacted and consulted.

#### **HANDLING AND DISPOSAL OF ANIMAL WASTES WHILE ON SCHOOL CAMPUSES**

**1. Clean up of animal wastes.**

Children should not handle or clean up any form of animal waste (feces, urine, blood, etc.). Animal wastes should be disposed of where children cannot come into contact with them, such as in a plastic bag or container with a well-fitted lid or via the sewage waste system for feces. Food handlers should not be involved in the cleanup of animal wastes.

**2. Prohibited areas**

Animal wastes should not be disposed of and visiting animals should not be allowed to defecate in or near areas where children routinely play or congregate (e.g., sandboxes, school playgrounds, etc.).

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3. **Litter boxes**

Litter boxes for visiting animals should not be allowed in classrooms.

**CONCLUSION**

Animals can serve as excellent teaching tools and students love to have them visit the classroom. When using animals as an instructional aid, the objective should always be well planned in advance. By following the above recommendations, the use of animals in the classroom can be made safe and enjoyable for both the animals and the children.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**

Please contact the Wyoming Department of Health, Preventive Health & Safety Division at (307) 777- 7172.

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## Hand-Washing Instructions

Washing hands thoroughly and frequently avoids many contagious diseases.

Thoroughly means:

- Wet hands with running water
- Pump soap into palms
- Rub together to make a lather
- Scrub hands vigorously for 20 seconds
- Rinse soap off hands
- Dry hands

Frequently means:

- After going to the toilet
- After petting or handling animals
- Before eating
- Before preparing foods



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**Parental Release Form**  
**Permission for Child to Have Exposure to Animals at School**

Dear Parent,

At times throughout the year, animals may be used as part of a planned activity or for instructional purposes. To help us protect the health of your child, please complete the information below prior to an animal entering your child's classroom. Please fill out this form and return it to

\_\_\_\_\_ by the \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Teacher's name) (Date)

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (parent's name), certify to the best of my knowledge that my child, \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name), does not have any allergies or other health conditions that I am aware of that would put his or her health at risk from having contact with animals.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's or guardian's signature