

Lycetts
We know your world.

Risk management in petting farms



Proud to protect your countryside. Your estate. Your farm. Your rural business. Your country pursuits. Your passions.

Lycetts has 25 years' experience in the leisure insurance industry and offers expert, impartial insurance broking services for a range of small-scale farms and community ventures.

An experienced and active adviser to a diverse leisure market, Lycetts is a member of a number of trade associations, including the FCFCG, the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens.

In addition to public liability insurance cover up to a limit of £5 million, it offers a wealth of specially designed products and services, such as employers' liability and cover for special events.

Here, Lycetts uses its industry experience to offer risk management advice to petting farm owners*.

Petting farms are an invaluable tool for the education of young children but facilitating the safe interaction of children with animals comes with its challenges.

There are numerous factors that need to be considered when ensuring that petting farm owners have sufficient protection including hygiene, prevention of disease, visitor safety and animal welfare.

Given the young age of many dependents, extra care must be taken to highlight potential dangers to the responsible adults and comprehensive and continuous training must be provided to members of staff.



Please contact us at your convenience to discuss your requirements

Hygiene

Good hygiene is imperative for the day-to-day running of petting farms and care farms, particularly due to the vulnerability of those using the facility and their susceptibility to zoonotic diseases and infection.

Over the past 20 years, an average of 80 cases of cryptosporidium infection caused by a parasite found in soil, water, food or on any surface that has been contaminated with animal faeces are linked to visits to petting farms each year**.

This is out of a total of around 2 million visits to the 1,000 plus farm attractions in the UK, with peak visitor times during school and public holidays.

Anyone can get cryptosporidiosis but it is most common in children aged between 1 and 5 years old.

It is important to note that outwardly, animals can appear to be healthy but pass on diseases that can cause serious illness in people, such as Salmonella and E.Coli.

Farm owners should comply with the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 and assessments should be completed and ideally documented.

As well as illnesses, skin conditions can also be passed on to humans, such as Ringworm.

Ringworm is spread from animals to people through direct contact with an infected animal's skin or hair and is most common in farm animals. Redness, scaling, cracking of

the skin, or a ring-shaped rash may occur and if the infection involves the scalp, hair may fall out and never grow again.

To lower the risk of public liability claims, farm owners should urge visitors to wash thoroughly using soap and water after handling animals and before eating or drinking.

Adequate signage should be placed at key contact areas on the site, such as feeding areas and cafes.

Responsible farm owners should also verbally remind groups to wash their hands, not just after contact with animals but after contact with fences or other surfaces exposed to the animals.

It should also be made clear that responsible adults, such as parents/guardians of children visiting the farm and carers, should take every care to ensure their dependant has been sufficiently protected against infection and disease and practised good hygiene.

If running water and soap are not readily available, it would be useful to install alcohol-based hand sanitizer dispensers (at least 60% alcohol) at each animal attraction and encourage visitors to wash their hands with soap and water as soon as a sink is available via appropriate signage.

Make sure that some of the handwashing stations are low enough for children to reach.

Owners and managers of farm attractions are also strongly recommended to make use of the Industry Code of Practice and Health and Safety Executive guidance on how to protect visitors and staff from illness, to ensure they are doing enough to comply with the law.

The importance of good hygiene should also be stressed to staff members, with adequate washing facilities and hygiene training provided if necessary.

As petting farms are family-orientated attractions, pregnant women are likely visitors. Unborn babies are particularly at risk of infection by contact with animals (especially lambing ewes). Suitable warning signs should be displayed throughout the farms, particularly in feeding areas.

Food and drink

Petting farm and care farm operators should be vigilant about the preparation and consumption of food and drink onsite as this can lead to disease.

Food and drink for visitors should be kept out of the animal areas and food should not be prepared, served, or eaten where animals eat and live***.

Operators are urged not to sell raw, unpasteurised products made onsite including milk, cheese, cider and juice – this can lower the risk of contracting diseases such as Brucellosis and Salmonella.

Provide signage advising visitors not to share food with animals. This will prevent young or vulnerable visitors from picking up any germs from the animals and protects the animals by ensuring they eat the right foods.

These signs should stipulate that responsible adults should ensure dependents carry out this practice.

Reiterate the importance of washing your hands before preparing food or drink and before eating and drinking.

Use plain language and pictures to show visitors how to stay safe and healthy when visiting animal exhibits.

It is advisable that visiting groups are given a list of health and safety instructions to adhere to before their arrival onsite.

Keeping visitors and staff safe

Children younger than 5 years, people older than 65 and those with weakened immune systems should take special care around animal exhibits and should be closely supervised.

Any potential dangers should be clearly signposted at the entrance of the exhibit and on the company website.

The animal areas should be secure and any animals displaying aggressive or unpredictable behaviour should be kept away from the visitors.

Out-of-bounds and staff only areas should be clearly marked and not accessible to youngsters via the use of code-protected doors or gates.

A first-aider should be on the site during public hours and an accident book with comprehensive details of any incidents recorded and signed by both parties i.e parent/guardian and staff member – this could help if a public liability claim was filed against the company.

Fences should be maintained regularly. Snags and rusted parts can cause injury or weaknesses in the fences can lead to the animals escaping and posing potential harm to the public.

Staff should be appropriately trained and receive regular updates, reflective of any changes in government guidelines.

Schools and other groups will be required to carry out risk assessments prior to a visit and this will involve checking that the farm has adequate public liability insurance. Make sure this information is readily available and offers sufficient protection.

Ensure that clear contingency plans are in place in the event of an emergency or unsafe behaviour amongst visitors.

Make sure that all staff are vetted and have had appropriate background checks before they are allowed to interact with children.

If there is any outbreak of illness, for example a string of cases of E.Coli linked to the farm, operations should cease immediately while an investigation is conducted.

Public liability claims arising from slips, trips and falls onsite should be a serious consideration for farm owners and managers. Every care should be taken to ensure public areas are kept free from trip hazards and all dangerous equipment and chemicals should be stored safely and away from children.

Keeping animals safe

The success of any petting farm or care farm is dependent on its animals – operators must do everything they can to ensure they are happy and healthy.

Make sure that you have background information on all animals and that they come from a reputable owner.

Unsuspecting farm owners could take a significant financial hit if they acquire diseased, poorly-bred animals with costly vet fees and lost profits.

But there is recourse if farmers fall victim to rogue traders.

Under the Welfare of Animals at Markets Order 1990, it is an offence to sell at auction an “unfit” animal. This includes animals that are diseased, ill, injured, lame, deformed or emaciated, or animals likely to give birth.

Misdescribing animals is an offence under the Business Protection from Misleading Marketing Regulations 2008 and The Sale of Goods Act 1979 states that goods should be of satisfactory quality, fit for purpose and as described.

Farm owners are advised to ask to see the parents, where possible, and check for any pregnancy or a record of any previous pregnancies.

The behaviour of the parents will be a good indicator of how the offspring will react – which is of particular importance as they will be interacting with the public.

The implications of an active pregnancy include unexpected financial costs (in vet and food bills), as well as loss of profits (a cow who has recently given birth would have to be kept away from the public as they are extremely protective of their young).

The number of previous pregnancies could also be a good indicator of how the animal has been treated by a previous owner. Health records of immunisations are also important.

Make sure that a vet carries out a full health check on arrival of all animals and regular check-ups are conducted.

Make sure that animals are looked after properly. This includes new hay bedding being put down regularly, fresh water and food is provided, as well as adequate shelter and that any sick animals are kept away from the others and treated as soon as possible.

Ensure that the animals are kept in secure premises and aren't vulnerable to predatory animals, such as foxes.

Ensure that pets aren't permitted, such as dogs, as this can cause distress to farm animals.

Any interaction between the animals and visitors should be closely monitored so that the animals, nor the children, come to any harm.

Checklist

Hygiene

- Comply with the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002
- Assessments are carried out and ideally documented
- Visitors are urged to wash their hands thoroughly using soap and water after contact with animals or surfaced exposed to animals
- Adequate signage is displayed across the site, particularly in key contact areas
- Make clear that adults are responsible for the hygiene of their dependents
- Alcohol hand sanitizer dispensers are installed where running water is not readily available. Encourage visitors to wash their hands as soon as a sink is available
- Handwashing stations are low enough for children to use
- Follow the Industry Code of Practice and Health and Safety Executive guidance
- Hygiene training is given to staff members, where necessary
- Suitable signs are displayed to highlight risk to pregnant women and those vulnerable to disease

Food and drink

- Food and drink is kept out of the animal areas and isn't prepared, served or eaten where the animals eat and live
- Be wary about selling raw, unpasteurised products made onsite
- Provide signage advising visitors not to share their food with animals
- Use plain language and pictures to show visitors how to stay safe and healthy when visiting exhibits
- Visiting groups are given a list of health and safety instructions to adhere to before arrival
- Encourage visitors to wash their hands before eating or drinking

Keeping visitors and staff safe

- Children younger than 5 years, people older than 65, and those with weakened immune systems should take special care around animal exhibits
- Potential dangers are clearly signposted at the entrance and on the company website
- Animals are secure and those displaying aggressive or unpredictable behaviours are kept away from visitors
- Out-of-bounds and staff only areas are secure and clearly marked
- A first aider is on site, as well as an accident book kept
- Fences and other boundaries are maintained regularly
- Staff are appropriately trained on an ongoing basis
- Public liability insurance is made available to schools and other groups carrying out risk assessments prior to their trip

- Contingency plans are in place in case of emergency
- All staff are subject to the necessary background checks
- Public areas are kept free from trip hazards and all dangerous equipment or chemicals stored away safely
- If there is an outbreak of illness linked to the farm, operations should cease immediately whilst an investigation is conducted

Keeping animals safe

- Ensure the animals' needs are catered for and they are properly cared for, including providing fresh bedding, fresh water and food, adequate shelter, rest and healthcare
- Ensure animals are kept in secure premises and aren't vulnerable to predatory animals
- Ensure pets aren't permitted, so as not to cause distress to the animals
- Any interaction with animals and visitors is closely monitored
- When buying animals, ensure all the background information is acquired and that they come from a reputable owner
- Where possible, ask to see the parents and check for pregnancy/previous pregnancies
- Ask for health records of immunisations
- Make sure a vet carries out a full health check on each animals that arrives and regular check-ups are conducted

* This is not an exhaustive list and is intended for guidance only.

** Source: Public Health England: "*Infection risk at petting farms: PHE urges good hand hygiene*". See [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

*** Source: Centres for Disease, Control and Infection "*Stay Healthy at Animal Exhibits*". See [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

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For more help and advice on how to manage risk at your petting farm, please contact David Still at Lycetts.

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