

PITTSFORD CENTRAL SCHOOLS

GUIDELINES FOR ANIMALS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide information to promote safety for teachers and students when animals are brought into the classroom or on field trips when students are in contact with animals. 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 inadequate understanding of animal disease and behavior can lead to unnecessary risks for children and animals alike and necessitates certain safeguards.

These guidelines are designed to promote a better understanding of:

1. Which animals are acceptable to be brought into school;
2. Which animals may represent a health hazard and are not allowed to be brought into school;
3. Which animals may represent a health hazard and are only allowed to be brought into school under strict guidelines;
4. Health considerations and procedures to follow when handling animals which have the potential to transmit disease;
5. Safety precautions for introducing animals into classrooms.

SECTION 1: Animals That Are Unacceptable For School Visits

For various reasons, the following animals are generally unacceptable for school visits, except in the limited circumstances outlined in Section 4.

1. Wild animals

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
- f. Pet rodent (e.g. mice, rats, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, chinchillas)

Wild animals pose a risk for transmitting rabies as well as other zoonotic diseases (i.e. diseases that can be transferred from animals to humans)

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 are explained in Section 4.

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 are explained in Section 4.

3. 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, they are inappropriate in schools. 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.

Exceptions to this recommendation are explained in Section 4.

4. 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.

5. Stray animals

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

6. 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, are not be permitted on school campuses. Aggressive, unprovoked, or threatening behavior should mandate the animal's immediate removal.

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

7. Unvaccinated Dogs, Cats, and Ferrets

Dogs, cats and ferrets that have not been vaccinated for rabies or do not have an updated health certificate are not allowed on school grounds. (See Section 4 for further details.)

SECTION 2: Communication of Procedures with Students and Parents

Students will be instructed on the appropriate safety procedures to be used when handling approved animals at school or school-related activities and the possible health consequences if the procedures are not followed. In grades K – 3 the classroom teacher will provide this instruction prior to the classroom unit or activity. In grades 4 – 5, the elementary science teacher will provide this instruction prior to the classroom unit or activity.

Parents will be informed of the appropriate safety procedures to be used when handling approved animals at school or school-related activities and the possible health consequences if the procedures are not followed by an informational flyer sent home by the teacher prior to the classroom unit or activity. The procedures will also be included in student handbooks. Copies of parent communications are included in Section 7.

Responsibility of the Parent

Parents are requested to contact the teacher or school nurse if their child is immunocompromised or if their child has an animal allergy or other issue related to animals.

SECTION 3: Guidelines For The Use Of Animals As Part Of The Elementary Science Curriculum

Approved live animals for instructional use in Elementary Classes

Pond snails, crickets, land snails, isopods, dwarf African frogs, fiddler crabs, toad eggs, toads, earthworms, crayfish, chicken eggs, chicks, butterflies, fruit flies, mealworms, owl pellets and fish are approved for instructional use in Pittsford elementary classes.

A request for an animal to be added to the approved-animal list must be made by the Science Standards Leaders to the District Health and Safety Committee for approval.

Procedures for the handling of approved animals during instructional activities

1. Non-latex gloves are required to be worn by students and staff during an activity that involves the handling of live animals that have the potential of carrying salmonella and other bacteria, i.e. dwarf African frogs, toads, chicken eggs and chicks. All other approved animals may be handled without gloves. The district recommends that persons with compromised immune systems do not handle any animals at school or school-related activities. Immunocompromised persons include those on steroids or other immunosuppressive drugs, i.e. those used in chemotherapy, or persons with cancer, HIV, organ transplants, or other diseases that suppress the immune system.
2. After an activity that involves the handling of live animals, with or without gloves, all students and staff are required to wash their hands following strict hand washing procedures. Strict hand washing procedures means using soap and water and rubbing the hands together for at least 20 seconds. If running water is not available, hands should be cleaned with an approved antibacterial gel sanitizer. (Purell and Vionex are the only approved antibacterial gel sanitizers.) If hands are visibly dirty, they must be washed using soap and H₂O. Hand sanitizers are ineffective on visibly soiled hands.
3. After each activity that involves the handling of live animals or a live animal demonstration, the tables and countertops used in the activity must be cleaned with a school-approved sanitizer cleaner.

4. During an activity that involves the handling of live animals, no food or drink is allowed in the classroom.

SECTION 4: Guidelines For Animals That Are Permitted To Visit Schools

It is important that animals that are brought onto school campuses be clean and healthy so that the risk of transmitting diseases is minimal. Children tend to be more susceptible to zoonotic diseases and parasitic infections than adults also because of their lack of hand washing and greater propensity for putting 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.

All animals that are brought to school must be approved by the building principal. Verification of appropriate documentation shall be complete by the building principal or his/her designee.

If visiting animals will be handled or touched, the procedures for the handling of animals for instructional use, outlined in Section 3, must be followed. The classroom teacher will notify parents in writing that live animals will be brought into the classroom. The notification will include the procedures for handling of animals and a request for notification if their child is immunocompromised or has an animal allergy or other issue related to animals. Copies of parent communications are included in Section 7.

The following are specific recommendations for some common visiting animals:

1. **Verified rabies vaccination**

Current rabies vaccination by a licensed veterinarian should be documented for all dogs, cats and ferrets brought onto the school campus for instructional purposes.

2. **Health certificates for dogs**

A health certificate signed by a licensed veterinarian showing proof of current vaccination against canine distemper, canine hepatitis, leptospirosis, parainfluenza, bordatella, and rabies must be provided. Animals must have had a negative fecal exam or proof of successful treatment for internal parasites in the past year. The animal should be free of external parasites such as fleas, ticks, and mites and free of obvious skin lesions. Dogs must be housebroken.

3. **Health certificates for cats**

A health certificate which is signed by a licensed veterinarian showing proof of current vaccination against feline panleukopenia (feline distemper), rhinotracheitis, calicivirus, chlamydia, feline leukemia and rabies must be provided. Animals must have had a negative fecal exam or proof of successful treatment for internal parasites in the past year. The animal 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, which is signed by a licensed veterinarian showing proof of current vaccination against canine distemper and rabies, must be provided. Animals must have had a negative fecal exam or proof of successful treatment for internal parasites in the past year. The animal should be free of external parasites such as fleas, ticks, and mites and be free of obvious skin lesions.

5. Wild Animals

Wild animals are only permitted to visit school, when they are presented by a professional, who has experience handling wildlife, and are displayed in enclosed cages. For presentations, the trainer may remove the animal from its cage as long as appropriate measures are taken to 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) are not permitted on school grounds under any circumstances.

6. Poisonous Animals and Reptiles

Poisonous animals and reptiles are only permitted to visit school, when they are presented by professionals who have 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 study glass or plastic).

7. Birds

Birds, both psittacine and non-psittacine, are permitted to visit school, if appropriate documentation can verify the animal is disease free and, on the day of the visit, the cage is clean.

SECTION 5: Guidelines For The Handling Of Animals On Field Trips

Because of the high risk of salmonellosis from reptiles, baby chicks and ducks, and zoonotic diseases from psittacine birds, i.e. parrots, parakeets, and cockatiels, we do not recommend the handling of these animals on field trips.

All other animals may be handled by students as long as appropriate hand washing procedures are followed. Hands should be washed periodically during the trip, before the eating or handling of food, and at the end of the visit. If soap and running water is not available, an antibacterial sanitizer, Purell or Vionex, should be used.

Students will be instructed on the appropriate procedures and guidelines for handling of animals on field trips prior to the trip by their classroom teacher

Parents will be informed of the procedures and guidelines for handling of animals on field trips by an information flyer sent home by the classroom teacher prior to the field trip. Copies of parent communications are included in Section 7.

SECTION 6: Guidelines For The Use Of Animals That Are Housed in the Classroom , but Are Not Part Of The Science Curriculum

The following is a list of animals that are appropriate pets to be housed in schools:

1. Small pet rodents (e.g. mice, rats, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, chinchillas)
2. Pet rabbits
3. Aquarium fish (salt or fresh water)
4. Non-psittacine birds (e.g. canaries, budgies)

Animals should be kept in cages or localized areas. They may not be allowed to roam. 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 provide care in the event of illness or injury to the animal.

All animals that are brought to school must be approved by the building principal. Verification of appropriate documentation shall be completed by the building principal and kept on file for the duration of the animal's stay.

If any of the above animals are handled by the students, the procedures for the handling of animals, outlined in Section 3, must be followed.

The classroom teacher must notify the parents of all students in his/her classroom, in writing, that there will be an animal housed in the classroom prior to exposure of the students to the animal. The written notification must include the type of animal and a request for parents to notify the teacher or school nurse if their child is immunocompromised, or has an animal allergy or other issue related to animals. Copies of parent communications are included in Section 7.

If there is a child with a diagnosed allergy to a particular animal, that animal will not be housed in the classroom.

Housekeeping of animal pens and cages

Strict housekeeping and safety practices are essential in providing a safe environment for student and animals.

- Animal pens and cages should be cleaned regularly.
- The classroom will be free from animal debris and droppings.
- Students may not handle any form of animal waste.
- Animal waste and soiled bedding should be disposed of where children can not come into contact with it, such as in a plastic bag or a container with a well-fitted lid.
- Gloves will be worn when cleaning animal pens and cages, followed by strict hand washing.
- Human food should not be allowed in areas where animals are kept.
- Cages should not be placed near ventilation systems to avoid circulating allergens throughout the room or building.

SECTION 7: Attachments

The following parent notifications are included at the end of this document.

1. Parent notification of animals used in instruction
2. Parent notification of animals on a field trip
3. Parent notification of animals visiting the classroom/school
4. Parent notification of classroom pets
5. Parent notification of animals coming home from school.