

Infection, Prevention and Control Practice Guidance Note		
Animals in Healthcare Environment – V02		
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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Traditionally, the presence of animals in health care facilities has been discouraged on the basis of Control of Infection and Health and Safety issues. To minimise the risk to patients in hospital, animals are not generally allowed on Trust's premises. The definition of animals includes all pets including insects, fish, reptiles and birds.
- 1.2 Animals can occasionally carry infections (zoonoses) which can be transmitted to humans, particularly people who are immune-suppressed or who have other health problems.
- 1.3 It is important to check that an area where an animal may have contact with patients no one has a known allergy to the type of animal. Where this is identified ward managers must identify risk management plans and ensure all staff are aware to ensure adequate monitoring. Some animals may also be difficult to control and may pose risks to patients due to their behaviour.

- 1.4 Contact with animals has been shown to have positive health benefits for some people, particularly children, the elderly and patients with mental illness and learning disabilities. The benefits include improved physical, social, emotional or cognitive functioning.
- 1.5 Guide dogs for the blind, hearing dogs for the deaf and dogs and cats which belong to the Pets as Therapy (PAT) scheme are not excluded from the hospital premises because they are recognised as providing substantial benefits for patients. However access should be discussed with infection control staff ahead of a visit.

## **2 General Risk Assessment**

- 2.1 If Cumbria Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust (the Trust/CNTW) approves the purchase of an animal or its visit to a unit, the ward manager or their deputy must ensure a general risk assessment is formulated before allowing the animal on to the ward. This should detail:
  - The care and maintenance of the animal
  - The animal's environment, who is responsible for it
  - Contingency plan in the event of an untoward incident occurring

## **3 Incident Reporting**

- 3.1 Any incident which adversely affects or results in a near miss situation involving a patient, staff member or member of the public should be recorded via the web-based incident reporting procedure and should be submitted as per the Trust's CNTW(O)05 – Incident Policy (including management of serious incidents).

## **4 Control of Substance Hazardous to Health**

- 4.1 Requires that an assessment of the individuals participating in any activity or process which omits dust fume or vapour to ascertain whether the individual has any allergies or respiratory problems which may be exacerbated by any part of the process of caring for the animal. Systems to monitor those involved will need to be adopted to ensure the safety of anyone who may be affected which would normally be through Occupational Health or General Practitioners.
- 4.2 This information should be recorded on the Department Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) assessment held in the ward/department office.
- 4.3 This practice guidance note describes the infection control guidance under which animals may be permitted on Trust premises.
- 4.4 Ward Managers should discuss and document ahead of any planned purchase or visit of an animal and the potential for their exposure to any person (staff member, patient or visitor) who may be allergic.

## 5 Pets as therapy animals and guide dogs

5.1 All cats and dogs used by the Pets as Therapy (PAT) organisation will have a record detailing their vaccinations, visits to the vet and state of health. This helps to minimise the risk of the animal harbouring an infection which could be transmitted to patients. A copy of the animal's health record should be available on request. PAT animals are also temperament assessed, fully wormed and covered by the PAT insurance scheme. Any PAT animal visiting a clinical area should be accompanied at all times by its registered owner. All visits should be prearranged and the nurse in charge of the clinical area will determine whether the PAT animal will be allowed into the area and whether any conditions or restrictions are necessary. (This will include a review of other patients or staff that might have an allergy to the animal).

5.2 When a PAT registered animal visits the hospital premises the following procedures must be adhered to:

- If staff or patients who may come into contact with the animal have any wounds, sores or broken areas of skin, these must be kept covered at all times
- Staff and patients must wash their hands before and after handling the animal
- Staff must identify whether there are immune-suppressed or otherwise vulnerable patients who may be put at risk from contact with the animal. If such a risk is identified the animal must be kept away from the patients at risk or even excluded from the clinical area
- The animal must be properly supervised by its owner or by a staff member at all times
- The animal should be kept on a lead or otherwise suitably restrained and must not be allowed to wander freely around clinical areas or elsewhere on Trust premises
- The animal must be kept out of the kitchen, all food preparation areas and the dining rooms
- No dog or cat food can be kept on the hospital premises, unless the ward has a resident animal and then food should be kept separate to human food, and clearly marked as not for human consumption
- If the animal shows any signs of illness the ward staff must request that the animal is seen by a vet. The animal will require authorisation from the vet before it will be allowed to return to hospital premises
- The Infection, Prevention and Control (IPC) Team may exclude the animal from clinical areas and/or from the hospital premises if it is suspected to be a source or vector of infection. The registered owner may be requested to have the animal examined by a vet before being allowed back into the hospital to ensure it is not a risk to patients or staff

- If the animal urinates or defecates in the hospital or its grounds, it is the responsibility of the animal's handler to ensure it is cleaned up appropriately - clinical staff should also check that this is completed in line with the Trust's CNTW(C)23 – Infection Prevention and Control policy practice guidance note, [IPC-PGN 10 – Cleaning and Decontamination](#)
- Healthcare staff should inform the domestic services manager if extra cleaning may be required, for example the removal of dog or cat hairs from carpets and furnishings
- When guide dogs and PAT animals are allowed on hospital premises, the animal's owner and health care workers must ensure that the animal is not a nuisance to other patients and that it does not interfere with patient care. If any patients object to the animal's presence then arrangements must be made to ensure that the animal is kept away from them. If necessary the animal may need exclusion from specific clinical areas

### 5.2.1 Fish

- Fish may be kept on the ward. Before stocking the tank, staff should ensure that no fish are toxic in the unlikely event of a client ingesting them. (Before purchase of any fish staff should discuss with IPC as aquatic care is complex and requires fixed cleaning regimes). The tank must be cleaned in line with manufacturer's instructions and hands washed thoroughly afterwards.
- The cleaning of fish tanks is often a messy business and all precautions must be taken to contain and minimise any contamination to surrounding environments from dirty water. Plastic sheeting, specialist siphons and cleaning implements should also be confined to the area and then bagged for cleaning in a separate cleaning facility generally a sluice or wash room.
- Every precaution should be taken to ensure hygiene is maintained as the implements will also need to be decontaminated and cleaned regularly after use as will the sluice area where the cleaning is taking place.

### 5.2.2 Birds

- Birds may be kept on the ward but there is a small risk of Chlamydia infection. The cage should be cleaned out in the sluice at least twice weekly and more frequently if required. Gloves and apron should be worn while cleaning and hands washed thoroughly afterwards. A disposable face mask should be worn for cleaning a bird cage or removal of dried bird excreta. Mask wearing is essential if the bird is ill. (Staff should seek advice from IPC regarding appropriate respiratory protection)

### 5.2.3 Visiting animals - Cats, Dogs, Rabbits, Guinea Pigs etc

- These animals carry potentially pathogenic organisms in their saliva and stools as part of their normal flora. However, examination and vaccination are easier with these species so that visits to the ward may be agreed at the ward manager and IPC discretion, no visits should occur without a formal review of risk by the ward manager in consultation with IPC.

### 5.2.4 Wild Animals, Hedgehogs and Farm Animals

- These are not allowed on the ward because of the likelihood of colonisation with enteric pathogens and parasites and behavioural issues such as biting and scratching. In addition, they are unlikely to have been vaccinated. If such a visit is indicated this must be agreed by the ward manager after consultation with the IPC team and Safety Team.
- Stray or wild animals must not be fed or attracted to CNTW premises as they could become a nuisance or pose a risk to health.
- Wild animals found deceased on or within CNTW premises should not be handled, advice on removal and disposal should be sought from the estates team.

## 6 General Principles

- All animal visits to be approved by prior arrangement with the ward/departmental manager, who will liaise with the Infection, Prevention and Control Team
- Other patients in the ward who may come into contact with the animal should be consulted about the pet visit to prevent anxiety for patients with phobias and allergies
- Animals must be appropriately immunised and these immunisations must be up-to-date. Staff must check with the individuals responsible for the animals that this is the case
- Animals must be clean, well groomed, free of parasites and in good health
- Exclude any animals which are aggressive or have a tendency to bite
- No animal will be permitted without their owners/handlers, who are to remain with their animals at all times
- Animals must be supervised at all time and suitably contained e.g dogs should be kept on a leash. Smaller animals must be caged but may be taken out for supervised handling.

- Assisting dogs e.g. guide dogs for the blind and hearing dogs for the deaf, are allowed access at ward level when they are working but must be supervised at all times
- In exceptional circumstances where visits from the patient's own pet takes place, pets are to have contact only with its owner and must be supervised throughout their visit
- Animals must not be permitted in kitchens, dining or treatment areas. Ideally they should only go into the day room or recreation area if there is one available
- Fish tanks and bird cages must be located in the day room, not in patient bays
- Animals must not have contact with patients who are eating
- Patients who are severely immunocompromised should not come into contact with animals, nor should those with known allergies to specific animals
- Patients with wounds may have contact with animals but their wounds must be completely and securely covered
- Animals must not be sat on beds. If smaller animals are to be placed on patients' laps etc., they must be sat on a designated water-proof covering. This must not be passed from patient to patient, but should be discarded or cleaned between patients and uses
- Staff must promptly wash and dry their hands after contact with animals or their excreta. Patients must be offered a bowl of water, soap and towel or hand wipes if unable to use a hand-wash sink
- If fouling of the floor occurs the handler or owner is responsible for ensuring that the mess is cleaned up. Faeces must be disposed of down the sluice hopper or toilet and urine must be soaked up with paper towels which must be discarded in a 'tiger/offensive' waste bag. The floor surface must then be wiped with Chlor-clean. Gloves and aprons must be worn and hands washed afterwards. Carpets or upholstery must be steam cleaned
- Bites and scratches must be reported via the web-based incident reporting procedure. If this occurs with a patient then they must be reviewed by a ward doctor as a matter of urgency, if a member of the public or staff member then referral to Accident and Emergency be made as soon as possible
- Sick animals should not be allowed in clinical areas of the hospital. Ward pets should be moved to a veterinary facility if they become unwell

## **7 Monitoring**

- 7.1 Compliance with this practice guidance note will be monitored by the Infection Prevention and Control Team in conjunction with the Infection Prevention and Control Committee and Safety Team.

## 8 References

- Guay DRP: Pet-assisted therapy in the nursing home setting: Potential zoonosis. American Journal Infection Control. 2001; 29:178-86
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- Khan MA and Farrag N. Animal-assisted activity and infection control implications in the healthcare setting. Journal of Hospital Infection. 2000, 46: 4-11