

E. coli at Petting Zoos
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Escherichia coli, commonly referred to as E. coli, has been in the news recently and several people have asked me how to decrease their chances of being infected when visiting petting zoos with their children, grandchildren and/or students.

What Are The Signs and Symptoms of E. coli?

Sometimes E. coli causes non-bloody diarrhea or has no symptoms. Generally the infected person will develop severe, bloody diarrhea and abdominal cramps 2 – 8 days after being infected. There is usually little or no fever present, and the illness goes away in 5 – 10 days. However, in some persons, especially those under 5 and the elderly, E. coli causes hemolytic uremic syndrome or HUS, which leads to kidney failure. HUS occurs in 8% of those persons who have symptoms severe enough to seek medical treatment. The death rate for patients with HUS is 3 – 5%.

How Can You Decrease The Risk of Developing E. coli at a Petting Zoo?

- 1. Provide lunch and drinks, or snacks, before visiting the petting zoo, and minimize eating and drinking after visiting the petting zoo. Do not take snacks or drinks into the petting zoo.**
- 2. After contact with animals or their surroundings, use the hand washing stations, or use the waterless hand cleaning solutions that are available.**
- 3. Those who come into contact with the animals must wash their hands after leaving the animal area. Children should wash their hands after leaving the petting zoo and after they remove their shoes.**
- 4. Remind children to keep their hands out of their mouth. Very young children should be carried as an extra precaution.**
- 5. Older children should be instructed not to kiss the animals or touch their own eyes, noses or mouths after petting the animals. Also, warn against nail-biting and thumb sucking.**
- 6. Children who feed the animals, need to be instructed not to share food with the animal.**
- 7. After a day at the petting zoo remove your child's shoes and clothing, and let them change into fresh clothes or night clothes. Bring a clean jacket for the ride home.**
- 8. Seek medical attention as early as appropriate if signs and symptoms of E. coli develop.**

Information for this article was obtained from the CDC/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.