

You may have seen in the press that there have been reports of people suffering sickness and diarrhoea after attending a farm experience at Gannow Farm, Inkberrow. It is highly likely that the cause of the illness is cryptosporidium. Therefore, we would like to provide some advice about best practice when visiting petting farms and information about cryptosporidium which can be shared with parents or anyone with concerns regarding the current situation.

Farm animals can be the source of several bugs that can be passed from animals to humans and cause illness. Some can be particularly serious for children or pregnant women.

Infection can be picked up from the animal's body, its poo or from areas where animals have recently been. If the bugs are on your hands, you could accidentally pass them to your mouth. You can't see the germs, so your hands may appear clean.

It's important to remember that even if animals themselves haven't been touched, hands may have been contaminated by touching fences or other surfaces in areas with animals; or sitting on and touching grass that is contaminated in country parks or farmland. Therefore, washing hands thoroughly with soap and hot running water immediately after you have had contact with animals will reduce the risk of infection.

The following key tips can be shared with families:

### **General advice to farm and zoo visitors**

- even if animals look clean and healthy, they can carry a number of infections that may be harmful to people, especially children and pregnant women
- cases of gastro-intestinal infections associated with animals generally increase during spring and lambing season, and also summer when people are on holiday
- if planning a group visit to a farm or zoo, make sure you've considered all the risks and provided the right advice before the visit

### **Things you should do when visiting an attraction with animals**

- read and listen to the advice provided by the visitor attraction
- wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after touching animals, fences or other surfaces in animal areas
- wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before eating or drinking
- don't use gels or wipes instead of washing hands with soap and water - gels and wipes don't remove E. coli O157
- remove and clean boots or shoes that have become soiled, clean pushchair wheels, then wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water
- supervise children closely to ensure they wash hands properly
- eat and drink in picnic areas or cafés only

### **Things you should not do when visiting an attraction with animals**

- do not put hands on faces or fingers in mouths while petting animals or walking around the farm or zoo

- do not allow children to put their faces close to farm animals or kiss the animals
- do not eat or drink while touching animals or walking around the farm or zoo – this includes not eating sweets, crisps or chewing gum
- do not eat anything that has fallen on the floor
- do not use gels or wipes instead of washing hands with soap and water

### **General advice for anyone who has been ill following a visit to a farm**

If you have a diarrhoeal illness:

- drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration
- if symptoms are severe, or if there is blood in the diarrhoea, contact NHS 111 or your GP
- stay off school and work for 48hrs
- stay away from swimming pools for 14 days after the last episode of illness

### **Further information about Cryptosporidium is available below:**

#### **What is Cryptosporidium?**

Cryptosporidiosis is a disease caused by microscopic germs - parasites called Cryptosporidium. Cryptosporidium can be found in water, food, soil or on surfaces or dirty hands that have been contaminated with the faeces (poo) of infected humans or animals.

#### **What are the symptoms and how long do they last?**

Symptoms usually begin 2 to 10 days (average 7 days) after being infected and include:

- Watery diarrhoea
- Stomach cramps or pain
- Feeling sick or vomiting
- Fever
- Weight loss

Symptoms usually last about 1 to 2 weeks in people with healthy immune systems but can last longer and be more severe in people with weakened immune systems. Some people will have no symptoms at all.

#### **Who is at risk?**

Anyone can get Cryptosporidiosis, but it is most common in:

- Children aged between one and five years
- People who care for or work with young children
- People working with animals such as lambs and calves
- Hikers and campers who drink untreated water
- People who swallow water when swimming in contaminated water

### How do you catch it?

Cryptosporidium lives in the gut of infected humans or animals and an infected person or animal sheds Cryptosporidium parasites in their faeces (poo). Shedding can last for several weeks after symptoms stop.

Cryptosporidium can be spread by:

- Touching your mouth with contaminated hands - hands can become contaminated by touching things that have been contaminated by faeces (poo) from an infected person or animal
- Swallowing recreational water contaminated with Cryptosporidium e.g. in rivers, lakes or swimming pools – the parasite is not killed by chlorine
- Drinking untreated water that is contaminated with Cryptosporidium
- Eating raw or undercooked food that is contaminated with Cryptosporidium

### How do you avoid getting Cryptosporidium infection?

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water:
  - Before preparing and eating food
  - After handling raw food
  - After going to the toilet or changing a baby's nappy
  - After touching pets and other animals, or their faeces (poo)
  - Alcohol-based hand gels do not kill Cryptosporidium
- Do not drink untreated water.
- Always wash and/or peel fruits and vegetables before eating them.
- Avoid swallowing water in lakes and swimming pools.
- During farm visits, wash your hands after any contact with animals, and only eat in designated areas.

### How can I clean at home to prevent the spread of Cryptosporidiosis?

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and hot water after going to the toilet and help young children to wash their hands.
- Clean toilet seats, flush handles, basins and taps after use.
- Wash clothes and bedding that has poo or vomit on it separately from other clothes at 60°C or the hottest setting the object can stand.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after handling soiled clothes or bedding
- Give the person with Cryptosporidiosis a separate towel to use.

### How do you treat Cryptosporidiosis?

There is no specific treatment for this infection. Most people with a healthy immune system will recover within one month. It is important to drink plenty of fluids as diarrhoea or vomiting can lead to dehydration and you can lose important sugars and minerals from your body. If you feel sick, try taking small sips of fluid, frequently.

Avoid tea, coffee, carbonated drinks and alcohol. Your doctor may recommend a re-hydration solution, available from your local pharmacist.

### **Do you need to stay off work, school or nursery?**

Yes, you should not return to work or school or nursery until you have been free from diarrhoea and/or vomiting for 48 hours.

You should tell your employer you have had Cryptosporidiosis if you work with vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the young, those in poor health, or if you handle food.

### **Using swimming pools and hot tubs**

If you have Cryptosporidiosis, do not go swimming or use hot tubs / jacuzzi until you have been free from diarrhoea for at least two weeks. This will protect other people from catching the infection.

Further guidance is available in the links below:

[Cryptosporidium: public advice - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/cryptosporidium-public-advice)