

## Tip Sheets

### Pets in the Family Child Care Setting

There are benefits to having pets in a home child care setting. Providers must also be aware of potential risks of having animals as well as take the appropriate steps and precautions to make sure all children, adults, and animals are healthy and safe.

***All pets, whether kept indoors or outside, must be in good health, show no evidence of disease, and be friendly toward children. Providers should also reference their licensing regulations as to the types of pets that are allowed.***

#### Benefits of pets in FCC setting

- Pets can be excellent companions and meet many emotional needs of children and adults.
- Caring for pets teaches children how to be gentle and responsible for others.
- Pets can teach children about life, death, and unconditional love.

### Health and Safety Risks

#### Allergies

Many children are allergic to animals, and may have symptoms when they are around them, especially cats. A child who is allergic to dogs and/or cats may also be sensitive to other pets such as rabbits, guinea pigs, and hamsters.

#### Injuries and infections

Puncture wounds from bites can cause injuries and even infections. Some animals can carry viruses, bacteria, and other potential infections that can be passed on to children and adults through direct

contact with infected animals or their stool, insects that bite or live on animals, and infections in the animal's environment.

Common diseases include salmonella, rabies, diarrhea (caused by *Campylobacter* and parasites like giardia, cat-scratch disease, ringworm, toxoplasmosis, and psittacosis.

*Pregnant women, infants, the elderly, and those with weak immune systems/immune deficiencies are at higher risk of catching diseases from animals.*

### Protecting Children in the FCC Setting

#### Reduce the risk of allergy problems

- Notify parents before they enroll a child.
- Do not bring animals into rooms used by children whose asthma is triggered by animals.
- Keep pets in a limited, easy-to-clean area.
- Keep animals clean and brushed.

#### Prevent injuries and bites

- Minimize aggressive responses from pets by teaching children how to behave around animals. This includes learning to:
  - Not to feed, remove food, or provoke the pet in any way.
  - Keep their faces and fingers away from a pet's mouth, beak, or claws.
- Before introducing any animal, learn about its typical behavior. This includes knowing how the animal behaves when frightened.
- Introduce children to pets in a quiet, controlled environment.
- Keep pet leashes out of reach of children to prevent strangulation.

- Do not let children pet an animal that is in a cage, pen, or tied up. Children should not put their fingers through openings in a cage.
- Do not let children interact with a mother animal or her babies while she is with them.
- Do not leave children unsupervised with pets. Check rooms where children are napping to make sure pets are not present.

### Prevent infections

- Keep pets clean.
- Children and providers should wash their hands after contact with animals, its toys/cage, and after handling any pet food and treats.
  - Children under the age of 5 should not handle pet food or treats.
- Dogs and cats should be appropriately immunized and be kept on flea, tick, and worm control programs.
- Dogs and cats use their tongues to clean themselves, so try to discourage pets from licking the children.
- Litter boxes should *never* be accessible to children or located near where children eat, sleep, or play.
- Keep sandboxes covered when not in use to prevent pets from using them as litter boxes.
- Keep pet food and water separate from kitchen sink for filling and washing.
- Keep pet toys, rawhides, bones, and food dishes out of reach of children.

### Licensing Rules and Regulations

The provider should ensure:

- Animals are maintained in good health and are appropriately immunized. Pet immunizations must be documented with a current certificate from a veterinarian.
- Parents are aware of the presence of pets and animals in the FCC.

- Parents are notified immediately if a child is bitten or scratched and skin is broken.
- Pets, pet feeding dishes, cages, and litter boxes are not to be in any food preparation, food storage, or serving areas.
- Child care indoor and outdoor areas accessible to children are free of animal excrement.
- Some pets, such as exotic pets like reptiles and spiders, may not be appropriate for the FCC setting. Check with a veterinarian if you are unsure and with your licenser for regulations and advice regarding pets in child care.
  - Rule 2, which applies to Minnesota, has a list of pets that are “limited to dogs, cats, fish, guinea pigs, gerbils, rabbits, hamsters, rats, mice, and birds if the birds are clear of chlamydia psittaci.”
- Venomous or poisonous animals are not appropriate for young children to handle under any circumstances.

### Additional Resources

CDC: Healthy Pets Healthy People  
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-pets/schools-daycares/>

For more information, visit [www.inclusivechildcare.org](http://www.inclusivechildcare.org).

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