

West Virginia Department of
Health and Human Resources

Child Care and Responsible Pet Ownership

Having a pet to talk to and touch can be a great benefit to children. Children can touch and talk to pets. They can share love and affection. Pets give children a chance to learn how to treat and take care of others. But there also can be risks involved in keeping pets in a family child care home. Furry animals (especially cats) may pick up and transport fungus spores through their coats. A child petting the cat can transfer these spores to her own body. A youngster may get bitten if a pet is mishandled or over stimulated in play.

If you already have a pet in your child care setting, you must use the Pet Acknowledgement Form (ECE-CC-10J) to inform parents before they enroll their child. Parents must sign the Pet Acknowledgement Form to give their children permission to interact with pets in your home. If you plan to add a pet to your home, notify all parents at least two weeks in advance of the addition. Some children have allergies or other health conditions that prevent them from interacting with animals or playing in areas where animals have been, while other children may be afraid of certain kinds of animals.

Basic rules to ensure happy, healthy child care children and happy, healthy pets:

1. The provider must always be present when the children are playing or taking care of the pet. Never leave children alone with a pet, even for a minute. If you must leave the room, take the pet with you.
2. Upon enrollment, each child must be taught how to interact appropriately with the pet.
3. Instructions should be tailored to each child's level of understanding.
4. Children should learn:
 - How to approach the pet.
 - How to act around the pet.
 - How to play with the pet. Children should avoid dominance games such as wrestling or tug of war.
 - How to feed and/or not feed the pet.
 - How to stay away from the pet's mouth, beak, or claws.
 - When to leave the pet alone.
 - How to share the pet with other children
 - How to wash their hands after pet play, feeding or care.
5. Keep your pets clean. Because dogs and cats use their tongues to clean themselves, try to discourage pets from licking the children and vice versa.
6. Keep sandboxes covered when not in use to prevent cats from adopting it as a litter box.
7. Keep your pets free from internal and external parasites. (Fleas can bite children too.)
8. Change soiled diapers immediately to avoid any undesirable behavior on the part of pets.

Pets allowed by regulation in the child care setting:



- Dogs
- Cats
- Rabbits
- Fish
- Small Mammals – hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs



Pets that are not allowed in the child care setting:

1. Reptiles, including turtles and iguanas: All reptiles carry salmonella, and can easily transmit it to children. Salmonella poisoning causes an intestinal infection, which can be severe and life threatening in young children.
2. Exotic pets:
 - a. Spiders – easily injured by children, may bite.
 - b. Ferrets - Ferrets love to pounce and wrestle when they play, which may frighten children, and children tend to play rather roughly, which may prompt a more vigorous response from an active ferret than from a typical cat.
 - c. Wild animals
 - d. Dangerous, aggressive, or sick animals
 - e. Birds - If you have a bird of the parrot family (a budgie or parakeet, lovebird, etc.), keep it away from rooms where the children will play or sleep. If infected, these birds can transmit an airborne respiratory illness to humans.

Responsible Pet Keeping

1. Pets should be up to date on immunizations.
2. Keep your pets free from internal and external parasites. Parasite control and other health care are important because how your pet feels directly affects how it behaves.
3. Pets should be trained on interacting with children. Pets that appear nervous, upset, or irritated around children should be removed to another location, such as a kennel or other area of the home inaccessible to children.
4. Make sure your pet is socialized when it is young so that it feels at ease around people and other animals. Gradually expose your pet to a variety of situations under controlled circumstances; continue that exposure on a regular basis as your pet gets older. Don't put your pet in a position where it feels threatened or teased.
5. Animal feces must be cleaned up immediately. Infected dogs and cats can transmit roundworms to children through feces. Following basic sanitation practices are essential to maintain the safest possible environment for both pets and children.
6. If a child is bitten or scratched while playing with a pet, act immediately. Thoroughly clean and dress the wound, then consult a doctor for further action. Remove the pet from contact with children. Be sure to notify the parents of any incidents.



Dog attacks are a serious health problem.

- Dog bites requiring medical attention in the United States number 500,000 to 800,000 annually.
- Countless more bites go unreported and untreated.
- On average, about a dozen people died each year from dog bites.

Dog bites can also result in criminal and civil liability for pet owners.

- Over the past 15 years, more than half the states have passed laws with stiff penalties for owners of dogs who cause serious injury or death.
- The Insurance Information Institute estimates that dog bites cost insurers roughly \$317.2 million in 2005.

Any dog can bite. Even the cuddliest, fuzziest, sweetest pup can bite if provoked. Most people are bitten by their own dog or one they know. Unwisely, some owners actually promote aggression in their dogs or allow aggression to go unchecked. From nips to bites to actual attacks, dog bites are a serious problem.

The tendency to bite depends on at least 5 interacting factors:

- Heredity
- Early Experience
- Later Socialization and training
- Health
- Victim Behavior

What kinds of dogs are most likely to bite?

Who gets bitten?

Of an estimated 4.5 million people are bitten each year, almost half are children younger than 12 years old. Statistically, the numbers of recorded dog bites are significantly higher in children than adults. The elderly and home service providers such as mail carriers and meter readers are also high on the list of frequent dog bite victims.

Children are the most common victims of serious dog bites. 70% of fatal dog attacks and more than half of bite wounds requiring medical attention involve children. The most vulnerable are 5-9 year old boys, but smaller children can also be seriously injured. Dog bite injuries rank third only to bicycle and baseball/softball injuries as the leading cause of emergency admission of children to hospitals. Children's natural behaviors, including running, yelling, grabbing, hitting, quick and darting movements and maintaining eye contact put them at risk for dog bite injuries. Proximity of a child's face to the dog also increases the likelihood that facial injuries will occur. Because children are the most frequent victims of dog bites, parents and caregivers should NEVER leave a baby or small child alone with a dog.

How to avoid dog bites

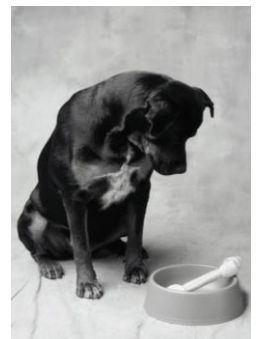
Dogs are wonderful companions. By acting responsibly, owners not only reduce the number of dog bites, but also enhance the relationship they have with their dog. **Regardless of size or breed, all dogs can bite if provoked. Responsible pet ownership is key to reducing the likelihood of a dog bites.**

- Carefully consider your pet selection. Consult your veterinarian. Puppies should not be obtained on impulse.
- Train your dog to respond to the basic commands. The basic commands "sit," "stay," "no," and "come" can be incorporated into fun activities which build a bond of obedience and trust between pets and people. Avoid highly excitable games like wrestling or tug-of-war. Use a leash in public to control your dog.
- Be a responsible pet owner. License your dog with the community as required. Obey leash laws.
- Dogs are social animals; spending time with your pet is important. Dogs that are frequently left alone have a greater chance of developing behavior problems.
- Be alert. Know your dog.
- Keep your dog healthy. Have your dog vaccinated against rabies.
- Neuter your dog. Neutered dogs are three times less likely to bite. Intact males comprise up to 76% of reported dog bite incidents.
- Be alert to signs your dog is uncomfortable or feeling aggressive.



Teach children:

- To be cautious around strange dogs and treat your own pet with respect.
- NOT to approach strange dogs.
- To ask permission from a dog's owner before petting the dog.
- To be on the look out for potentially dangerous situations.
- Not to run past a dog: Dogs naturally love to chase and catch things. Don't give them a reason to become excited or aggressive.
- To never disturb a dog that's caring for puppies, sleeping or eating.
- That if a dog approaches to sniff them, they should stay still. In most cases, the dog will go away when it determines the child not a threat. The child should try to stay still until the dog leaves, or back away slowly until the dog is out of sight. The child should never turn and run.
- That if they are threatened by a dog, they should remain calm. They should not scream. If they say anything, speak calmly and firmly.
- Avoid eye contact.
- That if they fall or are knocked to the ground, curl into a ball with their hands over their head and neck, making sure to protect the face.



Dog Bites

What should I do if my dog bites someone?

Even if the bite can be explained (perhaps someone stepped on the dog's tail), it's important to take responsibility for your dog's actions by taking these steps:



1. Restrain the dog immediately.
2. Separate it from the scene of the attack. Confine it.
3. Check on the victim's condition. Wash wounds with soap and water. Professional medical advice should be sought to evaluate the risk of rabies or other infections. Call 911 if paramedic response is required.
4. Provide important information including your name, address and information about your dog's most recent rabies vaccination. If your dog does not have a current rabies vaccination, it may be necessary to quarantine it or even euthanize it for rabies testing. The person bitten may need to undergo rabies treatment.
5. Comply with local ordinances regarding the reporting of dog bites.
6. Consult your veterinarian for advice about dog behavior that will help prevent similar problems in the future.

If someone else's dog bites you or a child care child:

1. First seek medical treatment for the wound.
2. Next, contact authorities and tell them everything you can about the dog: the owner's name, if you know it; the color and size of the dog; where you encountered the dog; and, if and where you've seen it before. These details may help animal-control officers locate the dog.
3. Contact the child's parents.
4. In addition, ask a physician if post-exposure rabies treatment may be necessary.



CATS: Soft fur, Sharp Teeth

Litter boxes

Young children are apt to put just about anything in their mouths, and cat feces may contain organisms that can be transmitted to humans. Most infections are mild, but if a pregnant woman becomes infected, it can cause birth defects in the unborn child (Toxoplasmosis). Empty kitty litter boxes daily. If you are pregnant, have someone else do this job.



Cat bites

Cats have sharp teeth. A cat bites one in every 170 people in the U.S. each year. This includes children and people who don't even own a cat. A cat will bite when it's upset, scared, or cornered. Statistics show that 80 percent of all cat bites get infected. If a cat bite bleeds fairly well, the chance of infection will be greatly reduced. The bleeding actually flushes some of the infectious saliva out of the wound. But, with their pointed teeth, a cat bite is more frequently a puncture that doesn't bleed very much, or at all. If the bite is in a joint, such as a finger knuckle, the injury can prove to be even more serious with the possibility of inflammation and bone infection.



Steps for handling cat bites

- Clean the wound immediately with soap and water, rubbing alcohol, or hydrogen peroxide.
- Put pressure on the wound to stop the bleeding.
- Hold the wound above your heart if the bite is on your hand or arm.
- Place a clean bandage over the wound.
- Assess the wound for signs of infection: unusual redness or swelling, increasing warmth in the area, red streaking, or fever. See a doctor if signs of infection develop.
- Get a tetanus shot if the primary series is incomplete or if it has been more than five years since the last shot.
- Determine the rabies vaccine status of the cat. The cat should be observed for 15 days to see if it develops signs of rabies if its vaccine status is uncertain.

Tips & Warnings

- Rabies is a virus that can be fatal if a vaccine is not administered in time.
- Seek medical care if the wound is gaping, if bleeding does not stop within 15 minutes, or if there are specific medical conditions or concerns. This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice or treatment.

Rabbits



- Learn about rabbit behavior/language so you can point out the rabbit's feelings about the children's actions.
- Choose a time of day when the children are on "low ebb" for teaching about the rabbit and for play with the rabbit.
- Set the children and the rabbit up for success. Try to anticipate and prevent inappropriate interaction by often showing children how to interact.
- Try not to get into a pattern of always saying "Don't..." and "Stop..." to your child care charges about the rabbit. If a child does something inappropriate, show and talk about what the child can do with the rabbit. Offer choices for behavior and ask "What could you do...?".
- Set up the cage so rabbit can get away from the children-"a safe zone". Use child gates in doorways and or turn the cage so the door faces the wall with enough room for rabbit but not the child.

Teach children how to interact with the rabbit:

1. **Gentle petting.**
2. **Leave the rabbit alone when he hops away or goes in his cage.** Interpret rabbit's body language for the child ("Oops, he didn't want anymore petting. He wants to eat or take a nap.") Prevent the tendencies to chase a rabbit that has had enough and to bang/poke on the cage by explaining: "Chasing him will make him scared of you." or "Banging on his house scares him." Watch children carefully and make such explanations at the moment before it looks like a child may engage in such behaviors. Explaining, then redirecting the child's attention works best for this age when inappropriate behavior seems imminent or occurs.
3. **Don't touch droppings and litter.** Teach children that the litter box and droppings that may be found on floor are "dirt".
4. **We pet, but don't pick up the rabbit.** Explain that it scares the rabbit to be picked up and both of you could get hurt. Explain that the caregiver may pick up the rabbit if she needs care.





Fish – Aquarium Safety

Aquarium safety should be a major concern for all child care providers. The combination of water and electricity can be lethal. The Consumer Council reported aquarium equipment as a fire hazard in their 249th issue and showed the results of tests on 8 water pumps, 6 air pumps and 5 fluorescent lamps. Only 5 passed.

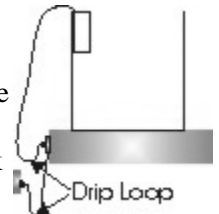
General Safety Tips

- Make sure the aquarium is placed on a secure stand that cannot easily be knocked over.
- Assure the hood is firmly in place. If children can easily touch the hood, consider using fluorescent lighting rather than incandescent lighting. The fluorescent lighting is much cooler and the resulting hood temperature is much lower, avoiding a possible burn from touching the hood.
- Aquariums used around children should have tops between the hood and the aquarium to avoid prying hands from entering the water.
- Two common chemicals used by the aquarist are ammonia and bleach. Ammonia can be used for cleaning and fishless cycling and bleach for disinfecting. These two chemicals, or chemicals that contain these two components, should never be mixed together as they form chlorine gas. Chlorine gas is a pulmonary irritant and causes acute damage to the upper and lower respiratory tract. .
- Assure there is nothing attached to the wall around the aquarium that can fall and crack the glass or damage the hood.
- Wash Your Hands after handling fish or working on the aquarium. Aquariums have some of the same sorts of bacteria and other pathogens that other animals have.

Electrical Safety

Electrical threats from heaters, power filters, air pumps, etc are real and should not be taken lightly. Heaters can be especially dangerous considering that their only protection is the glass wall around the electrical heating element. Cracking the glass from moving decorations, etc. while hands are in the water can mean instant electrocution. Here are some electrical safety tips that should be followed:

- Never remove the ground plug from electrical cords. All electrical components should be grounded.
- Use only GFI (Ground Fault Interrupter) sockets or extension cords with GFI protection. These devices sense when drawing current to ground and immediately shut off the electricity. Many homes have these installed in the kitchen or bathroom. Some homes have them installed in the main circuit box to protect the entire home; however, it is much safer to have the GFI socket where the aquarium equipment will be plugged in. They are not expensive, easily installed and found readily available at the local hardware store. GFI devices that plug into a conventional socket are also available.
- Route all electrical cords and secure them to the stand. Keep loose electrical cords and airline tubing off of the floor and away from children or pets feet.
- Do not touch electrical equipment while your hands are in the water (Lamps, electrical switches, etc.). If the aquarium is accessible to children, make sure that lamps, wall switches, etc. are not within reach.
- Use a UL approved strip connector or multi-plug extension cords to plug in all of the electrical components. Secure all power cords and air lines to the stand.
- Make sure all electrical cords coming out of the aquarium have drip loops. This means to make sure that the cord hangs down below the electrical outlet before running back up again (See picture). This will assure that any water running down the cord will fall to the floor rather than travel up the cord and enter the electrical outlet. If you are using an extension cord make sure it also has a drip loop. Even airline tubes should have a drip loop to avoid water entering the air pump.



Small Mammals



Because of the relative ease of caretaking and its responsiveness to handling and feeding, small mammals are a popular pet choice. If a child wants to handle your small mammal, have them wash their hands and sit cross legged on the ground. Place the animal in their lap for them to stroke under your supervision.

The Do's and Don'ts of Small Mammals and Child Care Children

Do

- Handle your pet gently on a regular basis: this will hand-tame it and get it used to being picked up, so it does not bite out of fear.
- Instruct children to leave the hamster or gerbil alone if it is sitting on its haunches and chattering its teeth - it is indicating that it is not in an amenable mood and may bite if handled.
- Instruct children to leave the hamster or gerbil alone if it is sleeping (these are nocturnal creatures)
- Instruct children to wash their hands thoroughly both before and after handling your pet. Not only will this prevent the transfer of disease (both human to pet, pet to human, pet to pet) it will also reduce your chances of being bitten as their hands will not carry any lingering and enticing food smells or flavors.
- Check your pet's accommodation and make sure all clasps and door mechanisms are secure. Similarly on the hamster ball before releasing it.



Do Not

- Allow children to handle pets without supervision.
- Allow your pet free access to a room without great care being taken and keeping them under constant observation. The greatest danger comes from underestimating their climbing abilities - they love climbing upwards but can be very clumsy coming down: in most cases, they just let themselves drop, which can result in fatal spinal injuries.



Small pet mammals such as gerbils, hamsters, and guinea pigs are born and raised in captivity and therefore they are never exposed to the rabies virus. Additionally, if a hamster, gerbil, or guinea pig were attacked by a rabid animal they would not likely survive the attack and live long enough to get disease and transmit the virus.

Response to Injury

Guinea Pigs are docile animals. Bites and scratches are rare. Hamsters and gerbils may bite if handled roughly or tired. If injury does occur:

1. Wash any injured site with soap and water for at least 15 minutes;
2. Control bleeding by applying direct pressure with a sterile gauze or bandage;
3. Cover wound with clean bandage (do not apply ointment or spray);
4. Seek advice from emergency room physician.