

## Disease Information Links

Department of Health & Community  
Services

[www.health.gov.nl.ca/health](http://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health)

Public Health Agency of Canada

[www.phac-aspc.gc.ca](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca)

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health &  
Safety

[www.ccohs.ca](http://www.ccohs.ca)

For more information, please contact the  
Animal Health Division.

Other information pamphlets are  
available online from the Department of  
Natural Resources at:

[www.nr.gov.nl.ca/agric/](http://www.nr.gov.nl.ca/agric/)

Publication: DS 00-001  
Last Revised: March 2010



# Health Risks From Handling Animals: Livestock Owners

Department of Natural Resources  
Animal Health Division  
P. O. Box 7400  
St. John's, NL  
A1E 3Y5

t 709.729.6879  
f 709.729.0055

[animalhealthdivision@gov.nl.ca](mailto:animalhealthdivision@gov.nl.ca)



## Introduction

All animals carry diseases. In most cases, these diseases are only a health threat to other animals of the same kind. In some cases, however, these diseases can spread to humans resulting in problems ranging from annoyance or slight discomfort to life threatening illnesses. A disease that spreads from animals to humans is called a **zoonosis** (plural **zoonoses**). In Canada, due to a cooler northern climate and well-developed health care and education system, the number of zoonoses that exist is not nearly as high as in more tropical countries.

This pamphlet is the first in a series that looks at common zoonoses. The others in this series include *“Health Risks from Handling Animals: Hunters & Trappers;”* *“Health Risks from Handling Animals: General Public”* and *“Health Risks from Handling Animals: Livestock Fairs.”* In addition, there are also pamphlets available on specific diseases.

## Sources of Infection

The two common sources of infection when dealing with animals are from 1) contact with animals and 2) consuming food made from animal sources or contaminated by animals (such as milk, meat or contaminated water). These second “food-borne illnesses” will not be considered within this factsheet.

The types of contact with animals can be 1) direct, as in the bite from an infected animal (such as rabies) or touching an animal infected with ringworm; or it can be 2) indirect, where the person contacts infected body fluids (urine or saliva), manure, or inhales infectious organisms in the air.

## Examples of Zoonoses

Almost every type of animal has a list of diseases that it carries which may infect humans. Those commonly reported in Canada include (\* indicates that a separate pamphlet is available):

Animal	Disease	Means of Spreading	Symptoms
Poultry	Salmonellosis	Contact with birds or manure.	Diarrhea
	Psittacosis	Inhaling contaminated dust.	Flu-like
Cattle	<i>E.coli</i> , Cryptosporidiosis, Giardiasis, Salmonellosis	Contacting contaminated skin or manure, often spread by sick calves.	Diarrhea, sometimes bloody, may be very severe (such as <i>E.coli</i> O157:H7)
	Ringworm	Contact with contaminated skin or objects.	Itchy, red, dry, scaly circular patches on skin (on the animals they often appear as crusty, bald patches)
Sheep & Goats	Q-fever*	Contact with contaminated animals or bedding, inhaling contaminated air. Cats can also carry this disease and in a barn situation may be significant in maintaining infection.	Fever, headache, weakness, sometimes pneumonia
	Contagious Ecthyma (Orf)*	Contact with skin of infected animals.	Skin sores on hands and arms that go from vesicles (blisters) to pustules then scabs
Swine	Salmonellosis	Contact with contaminated skin or manure.	Diarrhea

## Minimizing the Risk of Illness

In most diseases, it is the young and old who are the most vulnerable. This means that young children should not have direct contact with potentially infected animals (such as young calves), or else they should be monitored more closely if they are part of a farm family. All handlers should consider:

1. Wearing protective clothing (coveralls, gloves) that are regularly cleaned and not worn outside barns;
2. Washing hands regularly and avoiding hand-mouth contact (such as eating or smoking) when working in potentially infected areas;
3. Providing a convenient hand washing area with disinfectant soap and towels in animal handling areas;
4. Keeping animals that are known to be sick isolated from other animals to minimize spread of disease; and

5. Keeping barns and other animal handling areas as clean as possible, including the regular removal of manure and debris; the regular washing or disinfection of potentially contaminated surfaces (water bowls, feeders) and the provision of adequate ventilation to remove stale, dusty air.

Particular caution should be exercised when inviting outside groups, especially school children, onto a farm premise. Children should not:

1. Handle animals without being told about avoiding hand-mouth contact and providing regular hand washing opportunities;
2. Be allowed to approach or handle sick animals, especially such high risk animals as young calves;
3. Be given raw milk or be permitted to eat food in animal-holding facilities.

**Drinking raw milk is a risk to all people and should not be encouraged.**

When livestock owners are considering the purchase of animals, they should consult their local veterinarian to see how they can avoid purchasing sick animals.

For more information on human diseases or if you have any illness, please contact your family doctor or Community Health office. In addition, pamphlets are available on:

1. **Q-Fever in Goats**
2. **Contagious Ecthyma (Orf) in Sheep and Goats**

These can be obtained on-line or by contacting the Animal Health Division.