

Guidelines for Animals in the School Setting

I. INTRODUCTION

These guidelines have been developed to promote and support a safe and healthy learning environment for all children and staff. All staff need to be aware of the potential for adverse health problems resulting from the presence of or contact with animals in the school setting. Health considerations may include, but are not limited to the following: allergies to animals, illness transmission between animals and people, injuries from animals, indoor air quality, and animal care recommendations.

The age of the student should guide decisions about which animals should be in the classroom setting. Administration and school staff will decide in advance who will be responsible for the animal and what role the animal has in the student's learning experience. Protocol for animal use should be evaluated based on the potential for learning new information or for teaching skills or concepts that could not be possible through use of an animal alternative. Students and faculty involved in animal use must be able to demonstrate skills and knowledge adequate to comply with all guidelines in this protocol.

II. ALLERGIES TO ANIMALS

Background

All warm-blooded animals can cause allergic reactions, including rodents and birds. Animal allergens may be present in the dander, saliva, and urine of animals. When dry, airborne allergen particles can accumulate in carpets, upholstery, fabrics, books, desks, and walls (or other surfaces).

Allergen particles land in the eyes and are inhaled into the nose and lungs. On the skin, they can cause itchy rashes, eczema, and hives. They can cause a range of allergies and illness such as allergic rhinitis, asthma, hypersensitivity pneumonitis, conjunctivitis, and chronic sinus and ear infections.

Damp or wet surfaces are a breeding ground for molds, mildews, bacteria, and insects, especially if cages or other animal areas are not cleaned properly. Sensitive airways may be affected by the odors from urine, room deodorizers, disinfectant sprays, and the flea powders or insecticides used to control fleas and ticks. Carpets may become a trap for animal dander and are a potential reservoir for biological contaminants.

Animal biology labs with independent room ventilation units exhausting air to the outside are less likely to cause problems. Animals could also be housed in a separate building.

Once a furry animal is introduced into a school, removing it does not immediately stop allergy problems. Even after a thorough cleaning, the allergens persist for months. Allergens introduced into a central ventilating system may contaminate the entire school.

Guidelines

- Keep animals in cages as much as possible; do not let them roam.
- Clean cages according to animal guidelines (see section V).
- Locate animals away from ventilation system vents to avoid circulating allergens throughout the room or building.
- Use alternatives to animals if possible.
- Consult the school health office or nurse about students with allergies or sensitivities (privacy laws may limit the information that health officials can disclose).
- Remember to check for allergies/health problems related to animals.
- Locate sensitive students away from animal and habitats.
- Carpeting should be eliminated in classrooms containing animals.
- Clean floors and workspace surfaces weekly or more often if indicated.
- Require all students and staff to thoroughly wash their hands before and after handling the animals, – *Unwashed hands spread allergens.*

III. ILLNESS TRANSMISSION BETWEEN ANIMALS AND PEOPLE

Background

Animals in the school setting can increase the potential for long and short-term health problems for both students and staff. Maintaining a healthy environment in the school setting includes, but is not limited to:

- Controlling the spread of infectious disease and infections.
- Preventing the contamination of food.

Guidelines

Animal Health

- Current documentation is needed from a licensed veterinarian that the animal is in good health and able to be in contact with students in school.
 - Do not allow an animal with symptoms of illness in the classroom until cleared by a veterinarian.
 - Have the animal be up-to-date with appropriate animal vaccinations, as determined by a veterinarian.

Infectious Disease & Infection Awareness

- Keep animals in a specified, confined area (ex: cage, container, specific classroom, on a leash).

- Animals are not to be in the cafeteria or other food preparation/eating areas.
- No eating or food preparation in animal environment.
- Student/animal contact should be limited to specific learning experience.
 - Handling of the animals by the students should be age appropriate.
 - If the student has direct contact with an animal, thorough hand washing must be followed before and after contact. Wear gloves if appropriate. If open sores or signs of infection on hands are present, the student should not handle the animal or animal waste.
- Care of animals.
 - Teacher or animal owner is responsible for the cleaning and proper disposal of animal waste.
 - Elementary students are not to clean cages/animal area.
 - Cages/animal areas must be designed so that animal waste cannot contaminate other parts of the classroom/building.
 - Teacher to double-bag animal waste and arrange for prompt removal.
 - Animal care over vacation periods is the responsibility of the teacher.

Also see Section VI on Animal Protocols.

IV. INJURIES FROM ANIMALS

Background

Injury prevention is always a priority. The animal should be kept in an appropriate environment offering adequate housing, food, water, and care. The number and ages of the students should be considered when selecting an animal to be in the classroom setting. The animal's temperament (both the species and the individual) should be evaluated.

All animals will attempt to defend themselves if they feel threatened or have been mistreated. It is important that the school faculty provide appropriate instruction to the students about the care, safety, and special consideration for the animals.

Even with the above precautions, student injuries may occur. A mechanism to report, document, and evaluate injuries should be used to identify trends that are significant and warrant further action (different safety precautions, removal of the animal from the setting, etc.).

Guidelines

- School health staff must assess the injury, provide appropriate First Aid, and refer the student for additional health care if needed.
- An Incident Report must be completed through the building's health office whenever a student or staff member is bitten or injured by an animal. A copy will be forwarded to the School Principal.
- Repeated reports (More than 2 per quarter by the same animal or in the same classroom) will require further review by school administration, classroom

teacher, and the school's health office personnel, which may lead to the animal being removed from that classroom setting.

- Incident Reports will be reviewed by the Safety Committee on a regular basis to further track incidences and trends.

V. INDOOR AIR QUALITY

Background

The EPA and its Science Advisory Board has consistently ranked indoor air pollution among the top five environmental health risks to the public. Groups that may be particularly susceptible to effects of indoor air contaminants include, but are not limited to:

- Allergic or asthmatic individuals or people with sensitivity to chemicals.
- People with respiratory disease.
- People whose immune systems are suppressed due to radiation, chemotherapy, or disease.
- Contact lens wearers.

Guidelines

- Rooms that share an air plenum with adjacent rooms should not be used to house animals.
- Areas that house animals should have at least 10-15 air exchanges per hour with high efficient air filter materials installed (dependent on number and type of animal). The IAQ Coordinator will assist with this determination.
- The air handler filters serving an area where animals are housed must be monitored and changed as needed.
- The principal, teaching staff, site maintenance staff, and indoor air quality coordinator must agree upon the area selected to house animals.
- Rooms must be posted as an animal lab area to notify building occupants that there are animals present.
- Rooms should not be carpeted where animals are housed.
- A communication method shall be developed to report air quality concerns.
- Areas where animals are housed must be kept sanitary and clean.

VI. CLASSROOM ANIMAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROTOCOLS

A. REPTILES

Recommended Classroom Pets:

Elementary: box turtles, bearded dragon (observation only).

Middle and High School: corn snakes, anoles, and small geckos (possibly king or rat snake).

Not Recommended Classroom Pets:

Large snakes (boas and pythons) and water turtles (red-eared slider, painted, and snapping).

Any large venomous snakes or aggressive lizards (iguanas).

Dangers Inherent in Keeping Reptiles:

Salmonellosis – carried asymptotically in 75% of reptiles.

- Symptoms of infection in humans: stomach pain, diarrhea, nausea, fever, and sometimes vomiting. May be particularly dangerous in young children, elderly, and immunosuppressed persons.
- Prevention: frequent hand washing after handling a reptile, wearing gloves during cleaning the cage.
- Do not EAT in the classroom without thorough handwashing and first wiping all surfaces with a sanitizer (1 tsp. approved bleach in 1 gallon water).

Recommended Enclosures:

A covered cage of adequate size (escape proof), a heat source, and full spectrum lighting is necessary for the reptile.

Cleaning:

Reptile cages should be cleaned as often as every few days for some species to every few months for many types of snakes with very slow metabolisms.

Feeding:

This will depend on the particular reptile chosen. Some reptiles will require live food, others need fresh greens and others can live on a pelleted diet. It is very important to research the needs of each species individually prior to acquisition of the animal. Vitamin supplements, such as calcium for many lizards, may be necessary.

B. AMPHIBIANS

Recommended Classroom Pets (Observation Only):

Elementary, Middle, and High School: Frogs (especially xenopus-African frogs), tadpoles, and salamanders.

Not Recommended Classroom Pets:

Poisonous species.

Dangers Inherent in Keeping Amphibians:

Salmonellosis – carried asymptotically in 75% of amphibians.

- Symptoms of infection in humans: stomach pain, diarrhea, nausea, fever and sometimes vomiting. May be particularly dangerous in young children, elderly, and immunosuppressed persons.
- Prevention: frequent hand washing after handling an amphibian, wear gloves during cage cleaning.

- Do not EAT in the classroom without thorough handwashing and first wiping all surfaces with a sanitizer (1 tsp. approved bleach in 1 gallon water).

Recommended Enclosure:

Amphibians should be housed in a moist terrarium with adequate plantings and plenty of water. Tadpoles will need a circulating aquarium.

Note: Do not under any condition release either the frogs (*xenopus* spp.) or their tadpoles. They could quickly destroy the native frog population.

Cleaning:

In a balanced terrarium, cleaning will be minimal. However, frogs and salamanders should not be handled extensively since the mucous coating on their skin will wear down.

Feeding:

Refer to the feeding recommendations provided at the local pet store.

C. BIRDS

Recommended Classroom Pets:

Elementary: finches, parakeets, quail, cockatiels, and doves (observation).

Middle and High School: cockatiels, finches, parakeets, possible quail species, and doves, chickens, domesticated ducks, pheasants, and parrots.

Note: Parrots are extremely intelligent and require a lot of individual attention and care. Parrots are required to be hand raised, domesticated, and well bonded to the teacher/owner. If kept under the wrong conditions, they can become noisy and dangerous.

Not Recommended in Classroom:

- Small chicks in the elementary setting.
- Large parrots (expensive and require constant care and attention) See note above.
- Wild birds should not be kept as pets except under exceptional circumstances such as injury or abandonment. This is often illegal. Wild birds brought into the classroom without quarantine can infect other birds. Keep wild birds separate. Injured birds, especially raptors, should be reported if possible. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) or Raptor Center in Minneapolis should be notified.

Dangers Inherent in Keeping Birds:

There are two important dangers with birds.

- Salmonella – just as in reptiles – this can be passed from some birds to humans (See precautions under “Reptiles”).
- Chlamydia psittaci infection – bacterial infections which may be airborne – psittacosis can be transmitted between birds and to humans.

Symptoms and Treatments:

Symptoms of psittacosis in humans include pneumonia type infections. This disease was prevalent when parrots, doves, and pigeons were captured from the wild. When the birds

are hatched and marketed by reputable dealers it is extremely rare. Birds can be checked by a veterinarian to see if this disease is carried. It is advisable to quarantine all new birds. Birds exhibit the disease by appearing sick and lethargic with possible diarrhea and nasal discharge. Once diagnosed it is possible to treat the disease with tetracycline (both humans and birds) and the bird can be cured of the disease and will no longer transmit it to humans or other birds.

Recommended Enclosures:

Birds should have the appropriate cages for their size. These should be big enough for the birds to comfortably spread their wings wide. In fact, the larger the enclosure, the better. For the safety of the birds, feather clipping is recommended. It is painless, grows back in six months, and prevents a multitude of safety concerns including random escapes. Birds should be kept in cages when unsupervised.

- For chicks of any precocial species (ducks, quails, and chickens), use of a brooder with heat lamps, food, and water troughs is recommended. It is highly desirable to have the chicks displayed yet out of reach of the general population of students since they are quite fragile at this time. After approximately the third day, the brooder must be cleaned daily. It is not recommended that chicks be kept for more than about 10 days since they become very messy and may be impossible to keep “odor-free.” They should then be placed in a farm environment. WARNING: DO NOT RELEASE!!

Cleaning:

Cages should be cleaned at least weekly if the birds are in residence at all times. In the case of parrots who spend most of their days on a perch and go home each night with their owners, this time may be increased. The proper litter for birds is a pressed grass or corncob litter that will not create dust when cleaned. This will reduce any risk of psittacosis. It is recommended that masks are worn and/or students kept away when birdcages are cleaned. A mild bleach solution (1 tsp. bleach in 1 gallon water) should be used approximately monthly when cleaning the cage. Note: cedar shavings should never be used, as they are toxic to animals.

Feeding:

Nutrition is very critical to the care of birds. It is imperative that sufficient research be done on the care and feeding of the birds before they are obtained. Fresh water and food needs to be given each day, including weekends.

D. MAMMALS

Recommended Classroom Pets:

Preschool and Elementary: chinchillas, guinea pigs and small breeds of rabbits (mini-rex and mini lop).

Middle and High School: ferrets, rats, mice.

Not Recommended Classroom Pets:

Gerbils, hamsters, sugar gliders, hedgehogs, wild animals or other large mammals.

Note:

- Mice, hamsters, and gerbils may be needed for animal behavior experiments in High School but it is important to know that they are nocturnal, are quite small, tend to bite, and escape from their enclosures.
- Occasionally domesticated animals, such as dogs or cats may “visit” a school, however they should always be restrained (leash, cage) and have proof of a current rabies vaccination. The teacher and principal should authorize these visits in advance.

Dangers Inherent in Keeping Mammals:

E. coli, intestinal roundworms, tapeworms, flea bites, and allergies. Animal bites are common if the animals feel threatened in any way.

Symptoms and Prevention:

Symptoms of infection in humans are usually intestinal disorders (nausea, vomiting, diarrhea). Hand washing is a must in the prevention of worms; flea bites present as a skin outbreak and erythema. Allergy symptoms include rash, watery and itching eyes, wheezing, etc.

- Cages should be cleaned and disinfected as needed. This should be at least every 2-3 days. In the case of rabbits, feces can be left for a short time.
- Students should practice appropriate hygiene, (handwashing after contact with the animal). No food should be eaten with the animals present to avoid contamination.
- Students must be supervised at all times when animals are out of their cages or are being handled. Proper education in animal handling and care is necessary. In the case of allergies, refer to section on allergies to animals.

Cages:

Animals should have cages that are clean, comfortable, and suited to the needs of the animal.

- Pine bedding is best for bedding material. Note: Never use cedar bedding. It is extremely toxic to most animals.

Cleaning:

Mammals need a great deal of cage cleaning. They have a tendency to have a strong odor in a very short time. The cages require cleaning approximately every other day. The bedding should be changed at this time. The cage should be washed and disinfected with a mild bleach solution (1 tsp. bleach in 1 gallon water) every other week. Cages should be cleaned and disinfected as needed. This should be at least every 2-3 days. In the case of rabbits, feces can be left for a short time.

Feeding:

Refer to your pet guide as to the type of food for each animal. Mammals must be fed every day.

E. FISH

Recommended Classroom Pets:

Elementary, Middle and High School: goldfish and freshwater tropicals.

Not Recommended Classroom Pets:

Saltwater and marine fish are more difficult to care for and are expensive to maintain.
Poisonous species.

Dangers Inherent in Keeping Fish:

None

Recommended Enclosures:

An aquarium that is as large as possible should be used which has an adequate filter and air/water circulation. Obtain a good manual on aquarium maintenance.

Cleaning:

Follow instructions in manual on cleaning procedure.

Feeding:

Follow instructions in manual on proper feeding for the specie(s) that you have.

F. ARTHROPODS

(Including insects, crabs, and spiders)

Recommended Classroom Pets:

Elementary: None

Middle and High School: Observation only – hermit crabs and aquarium fiddler crabs.

Not Recommended Classroom Pets:

Poisonous species.

Dangers Inherent in Keeping Arthropods:

Injuries from crabs pinching when handled.

Recommended Enclosure /Cleaning /Feeding:

Refer to animal care guidelines from the local pet store.