

Controlling Risk of Transmission of Infections to Visitors on Farm Visits

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There is a certain risk for the transmission of animal-borne infections (zoonosis) from the animals to the visitors each time that visitors tour a dairy farm and interact with the cows and calves. These recommendations are suggested to minimize the risks to the visitors.

First, the visitors should be informed upon arrival about the risk of transmission of diseases, primarily digestive tract diseases, from livestock on the dairy to the visitors. Tour guides should have enough knowledge about the primary threats to alert the visitors to proper preventive measures. For example, school teachers should be informed prior to bringing their classes of children to the dairy. The main risk is with young calves on dairies.

After arrival on the dairy, visitors should be informed about the areas where they can view animals or dairy activities such as the milking parlor. Special consideration should be given to young, school-age children. Risk can be minimized by permitting children to view the animals from a short distance and to prohibit direct handling of animals. While children always want to pet the animals, it is during petting of animals that potentially harmful bacteria can be transferred to their hands or clothing. Food and beverage should not be prepared, served or consumed in areas close to animals.

Handwashing facilities should be provided in a conveniently located area. Running water, soap and disposable towels should be provided so that visitors can wash their hands immediately after being near the animals. With young school children, the adults in the group should closely supervise the washing. When children under 5 years old are present, adults should wash their hands. Shared water basins are not considered adequate. When handwashing facilities are not available, hand sanitizers may be better than nothing. However, many hand sanitizers have not been thoroughly tested to determine their efficacy.

No hand-to-mouth activities such as eating or drinking should be permitted until the hands of all visitors have been thoroughly washed and dried. This is necessary as most of the infectious agents that visitors might contact are spread by oral ingestion.

Under no circumstances should raw milk be served to any visitors coming on the dairy. While it is tempting to provide “nature’s most perfect product” right there on the dairy, this is very risky. If milk is to be served, it should be pasteurized and kept refrigerated prior to serving.

The risk of transmission of infectious diseases from dairy livestock to farm visitors can be minimized by informing the visitors of the risk, by minimizing direct contact between visitors and livestock, and by providing adequate handwashing facilities for the visitors. Thorough hand washing prior to eating or drinking and leaving the dairy will greatly reduce the risk of transmission. It is the responsibility of the farm owners and tour guides to see that these recommendations are carried out by each tour group.

For more information on zoonotic diseases such as Salmonellosis or E coli O157, check out this website provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

http://www.cdc.gov/foodbornoutbreaks/publication/recomm_farm_animal.htm