

INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL POLICY AND PROCEDURES **Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (The Trust)**

IPC15

PETS IN THE CLINICAL AREA

INTRODUCTION

Pets can enhance the quality of life especially in the long-term care environment. However, infections can be caught from a pet particularly if service users' immunity is reduced through age, illness or therapy. Sensible precautions can reduce this risk to an acceptable level. Good general hygiene and effective hand washing are essential for risk reduction.

Some care facilities allow service users pets to accompany them when they are admitted into care. Other facilities provide pets for shared enjoyment. Domestic animals such as dogs are often used for 'pet therapy'. In this situation, animals are brought onto the premises under the care and control of handlers but do not stay on the premises.

The management of animals used as 'pet therapy' should be addressed separately from those animals that are resident in the facility.

ANIMALS USED FOR 'PET THERAPY'

The registered provider should ensure that a written agreement is in place with the charity or individual that provides (and accompanies) animals for 'pet therapy'. The written agreement should include the following:

- The types of animals allowed for the purposes of 'pet therapy'
- Assurance as to the health and vaccination status of animals
- Their control and permitted behaviour whilst on the premises
- The routes for entry to and passage through the premises
- Any area where the pets are not allowed
- Any insurance liability of owners and handlers
- Only mature house trained pets are acceptable
- Who to contact in case of an emergency / injury involving a visiting animal

ANIMALS KEPT ON THE PREMISES AS PETS

HIGH RISK PETS

A wide range of animals, birds, fish and reptiles are kept by the general population as pets. Many of these pose few, if any risks if managed appropriately. However, some can carry diseases that can spread to humans and these should be avoided in residential care facilities wherever possible.

These include:

- Stray animals
- Sick animals / birds
- Wild animals / birds
- Animals with diarrhoea or any signs / symptoms of illness
- Exotic animals
- Caged birds which may carry psittacosis
- Tropical fish which may carry a form of TB
- Domestic pets that hunt and eat wild animals including cats
- Reptiles, which may carry Salmonella

Pregnant women may be at risk of acquiring pet related diseases that can affect the growing foetus. Pregnant women should be very careful when handling pets particularly cats.

GENERAL ADVICE

- Pets should not be permitted to lick service users or jump on them in a manner that may cause accidents
- After service users have touched animals, they should be encouraged and assisted to wash / wipe their hands
- Staff hands should be washed following contact with animals, their bedding and litter tray
- Pets should be exercised before being allowed to visit residents

PET CARE

Before allowing animals as pets, consideration should be given to ensuring that access to veterinary treatment is available and affordable. Ideally all pets such as dogs and cats should be registered with a veterinary practice

All animals should be well groomed and observed for signs of infection or other illness. If pets become ill, diagnosis and treatment by a vet should be sought as a priority

All animals should have relevant inoculations. Managers must satisfy themselves that such inoculations are up-to-date prior to pets being brought into the premises by service users and maintained thereafter

Claws should be kept trimmed to reduce the risk of scratches. Any scratches on clients or staff should be promptly treated with an appropriate antiseptic skin cleanser and an incident report form completed.

All pets, but especially cats and dogs should have their coats cleaned regularly. Bedding should also be cleaned regularly. Insecticides should be used as necessary, on the environment and the pet to control fleas. Specialist advice should be sought if problems occur. Additionally, dogs and cats must be regularly de-wormed. Dog faeces especially can pose a danger to children. In addition, some people may have or acquire respiratory allergies to fur and dander. Staff need to be made aware of this if pets are to be kept.

PET FOOD

Pets **must not** be allowed access to, or be fed in the kitchen or other food preparation areas. Doors should be kept closed to discourage access.

Pet feeding areas should be kept clean **and should be situated away from food preparation areas**. Pets should have their own feeding dishes, **which should be washed separately from dishes and utensils used for service users and staff**. Salmonella infection has been demonstrated to be transmitted from dogs to humans. Ensuring animals are kept out of kitchens (or other food preparation / serving areas) and that all utensils are washed separately will help to reduce the risk of transmission of infection.

Pets should not be allowed access to or be fed in the kitchen or other food preparation area.

Food not consumed within thirty minutes should be removed to discourage vermin and flies.

Recognised commercial brands of pet food should be used. Staff, service users and visitors should be discouraged from feeding pets with "left-overs". Pet food containers, once opened should be refrigerated (if necessary) or stored in plastic, lidded pet food containers / bins (which are available commercially). Food should, ideally be stored separately from food for human consumption.

Scraps of food must NOT under any circumstances be left out by staff or service users for wild animals e.g. feral or stray cats, hedgehogs etc. Wild birds are an exception.

A commercial brand of bird seed can be used to feed wild birds in hanging containers. Scraps of food provided for wild birds should be placed on bird tables / feeders off the ground and not scattered on the ground where they will attract wild animals / vermin.

PET LITTER TRAYS

Pet litter trays can be a significant source of highly transmissible micro-organisms and should be emptied and cleaned on a regular basis (at least daily). A few basic hygiene rules will minimise the risk of cross-infection:

- Pregnant women should not undertake tasks relating to pet litter trays due to the risk of transmission of micro-organisms such as toxoplasmosis which can cause foetal abnormalities
- Ensure staff or residents undertaking the cleaning of pet litter trays are healthy and immuno-competent
- Always wear a plastic, disposable apron and gloves when cleaning the litter tray
- Fit a disposable liner to the tray for easy cleaning
- Empty the tray at least daily and more frequently if used by more than one pet
- Do **not clean litter trays in kitchen sinks**. A non-food area should be used for all pet related cleaning e.g. sluice / dirty utility
- Litter should be changed daily
- Litter including faeces should be sealed into plastic bags prior to disposal and placed immediately into external household waste bins. Never discard into internal bins
- The litter tray must **not under any circumstances** be sited in food preparation, storage or eating areas
- Litter trays must be disinfected on a regular basis using a commercially purchased cleaner / disinfectant. Manufacturers' instructions must be followed.