

MEMBER ALERT

Animals Housed on Campus

Although housing animals in classrooms is popular, care should be taken in the selection of such animals as well as the ongoing maintenance and handling.

Some animals are not appropriate choices to house on campus because of the potential risk of injury and/or disease transmission. Several sources have listed the following animals as unacceptable for the classroom:

- Poisonous animals (spiders, snakes, venomous insects).
- Wild, non-domestic, animals (especially those at high risk for rabies; armadillos have been implicated in Hansen disease; Salmonella in hedgehogs; tuberculosis in brushy-tailed opossums; Hantavirus and leptospirosis in wild rodents).
- Wolf-hybrids (crosses between wolf and dog).
- Stray animals (dogs and cats—particularly those less than one year of age).
- Baby ducks and chicks (high risk of Salmonellosis and campylobacteriosis).
- Aggressive animals (an animal displaying unprovoked threatening behavior should be removed from the classroom).
- Other animals that should not be brought onto campus include: wild birds, snapping turtles, bats or skunks.

Reptiles are notorious for carrying salmonella, especially turtles. For this reason, many schools have opted not to have reptiles in the classroom.

The “safest” animals are those that are handled and exhibited in an appropriate manner. Clearly, the small mammals pose the least threat to children with regard to disease transmission. These include mice, hamsters, gerbils, rats, and rabbits. Hamsters and gerbils are known to be biters so the other species are preferable. None of these species are known to transmit rabies to humans.

Partnering with a local veterinarian can help ensure proper animal selection as well as ensure the health of the animal.

Whenever feasible, animals that are brought into the classroom should be cleared by a veterinarian before entering the class. In addition, strong consideration should be given to allowing only animals bred in captivity to be housed on campus due to the wide variety of diseases carried by “wild” animals. Animals must have current vaccinations appropriate to the species. If possible a certificate of health should be obtained by the supplier or a veterinarian before introducing the animal to the class.

An effort should be made to minimize student handling of animals, especially in elementary classes, in order to reduce the risk of transmission of disease, bacteria, and ringworm. Limited student handling also reduces the risk of bites and/or allergic reactions/aggravations. Students should not be charged with cleaning pens and/or cages unless they are closely supervised, gloves are worn, and strict procedures are followed. This activity significantly increases the risk of disease transmission and allergic reactions if not controlled properly.

Good housekeeping and safety practices are essential in providing a safe environment for both students and animals. Pens and cages should be cleaned regularly and the classroom should be free from animal debris and droppings. Classroom animals are a common cause of indoor-air-quality problems. However, diligence in good housekeeping will help prevent such problem.

Although it is common for students to take class animals home during weekends or over school breaks, such practices should be carefully planned and controlled. Written permission and acknowledgement from the student's parent or guardian should be obtained in advance to sending the animal home with the student.

Explicit written procedures outlining how to properly care for the animal should accompany the animal to the student's home. If there are any questions regarding the animal's health or safety, the instructor should not send the animal to the student's home.