

IX0400: Pet Therapy and Visitation

EFFECTIVE DATE: September 2006

REVISED DATE: November 2010, April 2017

REVIEWED DATE: October 2019

1.0 PURPOSE

To reduce the risk of animal-human disease transmission during pet therapy, pet visitation programs and residential pet programs.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

Pet animal – an animal kept for pleasure or companionship

Personal or visiting pet – a pet who visits the facility on an ad hoc basis or limited time frame to provide comfort to a person in a healthcare facility (animal visitation)

Resident/facility pet – a pet that lives in the residential care facility on a permanent basis

Service/guide animal – any animal that assists a person with disabilities with one or more daily activities. A service/guide animal is not considered a pet. Service/guide animal care and health is the responsibility of their owners who follow the 'BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act'. They will be given access to all areas in the facility except those noted in 3.1 below.

Therapy animal – the use of trained animals and handlers to achieve specific therapeutic goals; may also be referred to as animal assisted activities. Therapy animal care and health is the responsibility of their handler.

3.0 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

3.1 Animals are to be excluded from:

- Food preparation areas
- Medication preparation areas
- Operating Room (OR) including recovery areas
- Medical Device Reprocessing (MDR), Laboratory and Diagnostic Imaging areas
- Critical Care areas including Intensive Care Unit (ICU)*
- Neonatal nurseries
- Patients on Additional Precautions*
- Patient/resident bathrooms
- Immunosuppressed or neutropenic patients*

* Animal visitation may be considered in consultation with the care provider team for chronic/palliative patients

3.2 Animals in healthcare requirements:

- Examined annually by a licensed Veterinarian, be in good health and free of disease
- Rabies vaccinations are current
- Owners/handlers responsible for making available up to date veterinarian and vaccination records when their pet visits a facility

- Handler is to accompany the animal during entire visit and follow the guidelines of this document.
- Animals fed a raw meat diet including poultry, dehydrated animal products like pig ears, foods, chews, or treats of animal origin are excluded from visiting for 90 days
- Animals are to be immediately removed from the facility if they appear ill or sick during the visit

3.3 Animals with any of the following conditions are excluded from visiting for 1 week following the resolution of:

- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Sneezing, coughing
- Antimicrobial, immunosuppressive therapy
- Skin infections, ear infections

3.4 The following animals are excluded from visiting:

- Reptiles and amphibians
- All rodents including hamsters, gerbils, mice, rats and hedgehogs
- Exotic pets, mammals, zoo animals

3.5 Therapy animals:

- Handler must submit an application to and have the approval of the Volunteer Coordinator
- Handler must be a minimum of eighteen (18) years of age
- Handler must be a certified and approved member of an approved Therapy Dogs/ Pet Program
- Dogs must be appropriately screened, be a minimum of one (1) year old and have a completed dog history record

3.6 Screening requirements for dogs:

- Annual veterinarian examination, be in good health and free of disease
- Vaccinations are current including:
 - Distemper
 - Hepatitis
 - Parainfluenza
 - Parvovirus
 - Rabies
- Complete the required dog history
- The Volunteer Coordinator keeps all appropriate documentation for animals in healthcare facilities
- Dogs that test positive in the throat and/or fecal cultures will be immediately suspended from the program
- One positive Salmonella culture will permanently retire a dog from the program

3.7 Appropriately Screened Cats/Birds for the pet therapy or residential program will:

- Be full grown animals and not juveniles
- Complete the required history
- Receive a yearly exam and certificate of good health with all appropriate vaccinations
- Have passed a standard temperament test
- Be groomed (bathed, nails trimmed) within 24 hours prior to visitation
- Not be in estrus (heat) when participating in therapy work/visitation

3.8 Personal Pets

- Pet visitation must be arranged together with the patient care team, doctor, nurses and/or social workers, mental health services (may request personal pet stays with patient to reduce the risk of violence)
- Pets are limited to cats and dogs and must:
 - Be visiting a specific patient
 - Be clean and well groomed prior to entering the facility
 - Have a veterinarian exam and certificate of health, within the past year documenting current immunizations and being free of disease and parasites and in good health
 - Not be aggressive, hyperactive or difficult to control
 - Be supervised and contained with leash/cage, by the designated pet handler at all times and includes any necessary care and cleanup
 - Have no contact with medical equipment, invasive devices, wounds, dressings or bandages
 - Where possible, pets are permitted on beds and laps with a disposable or washable waterproof barrier, such as a soaker pad or blue pad, placed between their clothes/blankets and the animal

3.9 If an animal bites or scratches:

- Immediately remove animal
- Nursing staff are to be alerted immediately to ensure appropriate treatment is given and documentation occurs

4.0 PROCEDURE

4.1 Arranging an animal visit in acute care:

- All visits will be organized with the patient care team including nurses, physicians, area manager and/or social worker
- The supervising nurse and/or charge nurse will be notified that the animal visit is to occur
- Follow the guidelines above for Personal Pet visits

4.2 Animal related hand hygiene practices include:

- Patients/residents – before and after animal contact
- Handlers – between rooms
- Handlers to carry alcohol based hand rub (ABHR)
- After cleaning up pet excrement, litter boxes, bird cages or aquariums

4.3 Animal waste:

- If animal waste occurs at any time during the visit, the dog handler will be responsible for immediately cleaning the area with the approved provided clean-up kit. The handler will be provided with the following materials:
 - Disposable gloves
 - Plastic bags
 - A container of a germicidal cleaning agent

(All used materials will be put in the plastic bag which will be disposed of in an appropriate waste container.)

- For resident animals, a facility policy should be in place that identifies who is responsible for clean-up and what procedures are to be followed

4.4 **Animals or pets in a residential care facility:**

- There must be a dedicated person(s) responsible for the care of any resident or facility pet. Documentation is required and this individual is responsible for:
 - Ongoing veterinary care arrangements
 - Feeding – food and water bowls should be washed daily
 - Cleaning and sanitizing living space, bedding and toys following facility procedures, using facility approved products
- There is a dedicated storage area for pet supplies away from medication rooms, clean supply rooms and kitchens
- Litter boxes must be stored in a place where residents do not have access to it. A 'walk-off tray' is recommended to contain scattered litter and excrement. Litter must be changed routinely; only non-pregnant staff clean litter boxes
- Bird cages should have a cleanable container under the cage to contain scattered birdseed, feathers, etc. Cages must be cleaned routinely.
- Aquarium water should not be disposed of in sinks used for hand hygiene, food preparation or drinking water. Sinks must be cleaned and disinfected following use.
- Any animal displaying signs of illness should be isolated and examined by a veterinarian.
- **During facility outbreaks**, the resident pet must be restricted in a separate environment. One-to-one visits with non-affected residents may be permitted in consultation with the care team.

5.0 REFERENCES

- 1) Sandra L. Lefebvre, et al. **Guidelines for animals – assisted interventions in health care facilities.** AJIC American Journal of Infection Control 2008; 36:2 pp 78-85.
- 2) Routine Practices and Additional Precautions for Preventing the Transmission of Infection in Health Care Settings; Public Health Agency of Canada; 2013, P.32.
- 3) Raw Food Diets for Pets – Canadian Veterinary Medical Association & Public Health Agency of Canada Joint Position Statement; July 2016.
- 4) **Infection Prevention & Control Guidelines for Animals in Health Care Facilities.** Alberta Health Services; October 2015.