



Handout: Health and Safety Risks When Handling and Restraining Animals

Introduction

Handling and restraining animals come with inherent risks that can affect both the handler and the animal. Understanding these risks and taking appropriate measures to mitigate them is crucial for ensuring safety and well-being. This handout covers the primary health and safety risks, including zoonotic diseases, the importance of hand hygiene, and managing animal behaviour.

Zoonotic Diseases

1. What are Zoonotic Diseases?

- **Definition:** Zoonotic diseases are infections that can be transmitted from animals to humans. They can be caused by bacteria, viruses, parasites, and fungi.
- **Examples:**
 - **Rabies:** A viral disease that affects the nervous system and can be fatal if not treated promptly.
 - **Ringworm:** A fungal infection that causes a red, itchy rash on the skin.
 - **Salmonella:** A bacterial infection that can cause gastrointestinal illness.

2. Preventing Zoonotic Diseases

- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** Wear gloves, masks, and other protective gear when handling animals, especially those known to carry zoonotic diseases.
- **Vaccinations:** Ensure animals are vaccinated against common zoonotic diseases when possible.
- **Hygiene:** Practice good personal hygiene, including thorough hand washing, to reduce the risk of transmission.

Washing Hands Thoroughly

1. Importance of Hand Hygiene

- **Prevent Disease Transmission:** Washing hands removes pathogens that can cause illness.
- **Protect Yourself and Others:** Prevents the spread of diseases to other humans and animals.

2. Proper Hand Washing Technique

- **Wet Hands:** Use clean, running water to wet your hands.
- **Apply Soap:** Apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces.
- **Scrub Thoroughly:** Rub hands together for at least 20 seconds, ensuring you scrub the backs of hands, between fingers, and under nails.
- **Rinse Well:** Rinse hands under clean, running water.
- **Dry Hands:** Use a clean towel or air dry your hands.



3. When to Wash Hands

- **Before and After Handling Animals:** Always wash your hands before and after handling animals to prevent the spread of pathogens.
- **After Removing PPE:** Wash hands immediately after removing gloves or other protective equipment.
- **After Cleaning Animal Areas:** Clean your hands after cleaning cages, enclosures, or any area where animals are kept.

Animal Behaviour

1. Understanding Animal Behaviour

- **Body Language:** Learn to recognise signs of stress, fear, aggression, and contentment in animals.
 - **Signs of Stress/Fear:** Cowering, ears pinned back, tail tucked, trembling.
 - **Signs of Aggression:** Growling, hissing, baring teeth, raised hackles.
- **Vocalisations:** Pay attention to sounds animals make, as they can indicate different emotions and intentions.

2. Managing Animal Behaviour

- **Approach Calmly:** Move slowly and speak gently to avoid startling the animal.
- **Use Restraint Equipment:** Use appropriate restraint equipment to safely control the animal without causing harm.
- **Respect Boundaries:** Understand and respect the animal's personal space. If an animal shows signs of discomfort or aggression, give it space and time to calm down.

3. Reducing Stress in Animals

- **Familiar Environment:** Whenever possible, handle animals in a familiar and quiet environment.
- **Minimise Handling Time:** Reduce the duration of handling and restraint to minimise stress.
- **Positive Reinforcement:** Use treats or positive reinforcement to create a more positive experience for the animal.

Conclusion

Understanding the health and safety risks associated with handling and restraining animals is essential for maintaining a safe environment for both the handler and the animal. By being aware of zoonotic diseases, practicing good hand hygiene, and effectively managing animal behaviour, you can reduce risks and ensure a safer, more positive interaction with animals.