

Animals in the classroom can contribute greatly to the learning experience for students. Precautions should be taken to minimize the risk for injury or illness to students and ensure the pet's health.

## Effective Teaching Aid

Animals in the classroom can be an effective teaching aid and enrich classroom experiences. They can stimulate learning, encourage nurturing, build self-esteem, teach responsibility, develop compassion, and promote the human animal bond.

## Be Aware of Risk

Handling animals does come with some risks, including bites, scratches, allergies and zoonotic diseases (e.g., salmonellosis, ringworm, rabies). Animals often show no signs of illness and some germs can live for months or years in the environment.

## Avoid Certain Animal Species

Certain animals are not recommended for the classroom because of the risk of injury or disease for children, especially those less than 5 years of age. These include

- Reptiles (turtles, lizards, or snakes)
- Amphibians (frogs)
- Baby chicks and ducklings
- Animals younger than 6 months of age
- Exotic pets, such as monkeys, sugar gliders, prairie dogs
- Wild animals, such as raccoons or skunks
- Dangerous animals, such as tigers, wolves, or venomous spiders or insects

## Precautions For Children

Follow these general guidelines to help prevent the spread of germs that could potentially cause illness.

- Hands must be washed after any contact with animals, animal products (e.g., food) or animal environments (e.g., cages, aquaria)
  - Supervise children so hands are washed thoroughly
- Always supervise children when handling animals
- Display animals in cages or under appropriate restraint
- Designate specific areas for animal contact
  - Do not allow food or drink in animal contact areas
  - Do not allow animals where food and drink are prepared
- Contact parents regarding any allergies and obtain parental notification forms.
- Report any bites, scratches, or allergies to the school nurse and the student's parent

## Maintain Animal Health

- Before selecting a pet, consult a veterinarian to learn
  - What animal species may be suitable for your classroom
  - What care and medical needs (vaccinations, parasite control) are required
  - Proper handling, feeding, habitat and care of the species
- Have the animal examined by a veterinarian prior to introduction into the classroom
- Maintain proper housing (and space) to minimize stress or overcrowding.
  - Provide pet with a safe "hiding" area in their cage/aquaria
  - Monitor animals daily for signs of illness
  - Avoid placing cages/aquaria in drafty or direct sunlight
  - Consider building heating/cooling during weekends, holidays, and summer - make necessary care arrangements

Clean cages/aquaria at least weekly to minimize odor and maintain healthy and sanitary conditions for the animal

- Wear gloves when cleaning cages/aquaria
- Remove animal from the cage when disinfecting
- Use unscented sanitizer or disinfectant. A freshly prepared bleach solution (1:10) is generally effective
- Allow disinfectant to "sit" for 10-15 minutes
- Rinse thoroughly before returning animal to cage/aquaria
- Disinfect any surfaces the animal came in contact with
- Do not clean cages/aquaria in areas used for food preparation or drinking water

## For More Information

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - National Center for Injury Prevention and Control**

Healthy Pets Healthy People at [www.cdc.gov/healthypets/](http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/)  
Animals in Schools at [www.cdc.gov/features/animalsinschools/](http://www.cdc.gov/features/animalsinschools/)  
KidTastic Podcasts at <http://www2c.cdc.gov/podcasts/>  
Guidelines for Animals in School Settings at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5605a5.htm>

**The Pet Care Trust**

Pets in the Classroom at [www.petsintheclassroom.org](http://www.petsintheclassroom.org)

**PetSmart**

Teacher's Guide to Classroom Pets at <http://pets.petsmart.com/guides/teachers-guide/index.shtml/>