

General Information / E. coli Outbreak

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Animal Industry (DAI) personnel are assisting the Florida Department of Health (DOH) in the investigation of an E. coli outbreak that has been associated with animal petting exhibits at local fairs. Inspectors are inspecting these areas and discussing disease transmission concerns with facility management.

Key Messages

- A serious outbreak of disease has been reported by DOH. Although no definitive source of disease has been determined, one of the associations being made is with some of the affected children being in contact with petting zoos or petting areas involving calves, lambs, and baby goats.
- Outbreaks are often associated with hand-to-mouth contact (fecal-oral transmission).
- Many of these pathogens do not cause illness in animals.
- Implementing general sanitary measures is the primary means of prevention at petting animal sites.
- In this current outbreak, DAI is assisting DOH by identifying and tracing petting animals and sampling these animals for laboratory testing.

Prevention Steps

The single most important step in protecting against human infection from animal exhibit settings is to take general sanitary measures to avoid contamination of hands and clothing with animal manure and to wash hands after direct contact with farm animals.

Recommendations in a recently published CDC compendium include:

- 1) Education of operators, staff, and visitors about the potential risk and measures to prevent infection.
 - a. This includes visible signage to refrain from eating in animal contact areas and the importance of washing hands after handling animals.
 - b. These signs should be age and language appropriate.
 - c. Staff should supervise animal-visitor interactions and monitor for appropriate behavior.
- 2) Design and management of facilities to control potential transmission events.
 - a. Facilities should have designated animal areas and non-animal areas (i.e., where food consumption may occur).
 - b. Hand washing facilities should be clearly identified and able to handle the number of visitors.
- 3) Young children must be monitored closely to ensure above safeguards are followed.