PETS
in the classroom

MYFCPH.ORG
According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), reptiles and amphibians often serve as asymptomatic carriers. Approximately 70,000 people get salmonellosis from contact with reptiles in the United States every year. Rodents, including pet and feeder rodents, hedgehogs, and other small pets have been linked to outbreaks of human salmonellosis. Prevalence may be higher in pets exposed to raw and live pet foods.

Additionally, allergens shed by mammals and birds can be asthma triggers. The CDC also estimates that, each year, U.S. students miss about 14 million days because of asthma. These are just few of the possible risks that are associated with pets. This does not mean that animals must be completely excluded from all schools, but it does illustrate the importance of proper handling of pets.

By practicing appropriate caution, and developing specific rules about classroom pets, we can limit the health risks associated with classroom pets. This material is presented as a guide for school administrators/teachers to assist in making decisions and assessing the risks. Franklin County Public Health hopes that this document provides you with all the tools necessary to understand the risks, effective communication, address concerns from parents/legal guardians of students, and risk control on animals present in your facility.
Benefits of Pets in the Classroom

TEACHES RESPONSIBILITY
Having a classroom pet allows children to understand the responsibility that is involved in taking care of an animal.

STUDENTS LEARN COMPASSION
A classroom pet is a great way to teach children compassion and how to nurture. Children will learn how to properly handle and care for the pet.

THERAPEUTIC FOR CHILDREN
Classroom pets can bring calmness to children who have anxiety or stress in their lives.

ENRICHMENT OF CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE
Classroom pets introduce children to the world of animals. If students don’t have a pet of their own at home, they can see, feel, touch and learn what it takes to care for one at school.

A SAMPLE PARENTAL NOTIFICATION FORM IS INCLUDED AT THE END OF THIS DOCUMENT

Before you introduce a classroom pet to your students, send this form home and request that the student’s parents read, fill out and sign. Having a parent fill out a form like this could provide important information like allergic reactions to a specific animal for that student.
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.

- Venomous and toxin producing reptiles (turtles, lizards, or snakes) and 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

We are not safe classroom pets
If you feed your pets live foods like **crickets**, **cockroaches**, **locust**, be aware that these rodents can carry germs. These germs can cause sickness to the kids. Wash your hands after handling and feeding live foods every time.

Never allow children to handle live foods. The class teacher should always monitor any interactions with the pets and live foods. The health of crickets and other live food is also important. Sick crickets can lead to sick pets. Keep cricket enclosures clean and do not let crickets eat moldy or otherwise spoiled food.
PETS in the classroom

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 areas or in direct sunlight
• Consider building heating/cooling during weekends, holidays, and each season.
• 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
• Cleaning of pet enclosures should be done as often as necessary to keep the animal healthy, prevent odors from building up, and eliminate any unsanitary conditions. It should be noted that cleaning and disinfection may be necessary as often as daily, however it should be done weekly at a minimum.
• Enclosures should be sanitized after each cleaning with a fresh bleach solution (4oz of 5.25% unscented chlorine bleach to one gallon of water) OR a quaternary ammonia solution at a dilution suggested by the manufacturer for food service uses (NEVER MIX CHEMICALS!). Food and water bowls should be thoroughly scrubbed and rinsed with hot soapy water. As animals can be sensitive to sanitizers, care should be taken in adequately rinsing and drying the enclosure before putting the animal back in the enclosure. Some pathogens will not be killed by the sanitizers but may be removed by rinsing thoroughly with water (this will also remove residual amounts of sanitizers). An animal's sensitivity is not an adequate reason to avoid the use of sanitizers.
• Animal enclosures must never be cleaned in plumbing fixtures used for food service, drinking water, or handwashing purposes. After cleaning the enclosure, the fixtures used to clean the enclosure should also be cleaned and sanitized.

Cleaning Product Guidelines

Chlorine/Bleach
Chlorine/bleach should never be used on metal. It can result in pitting and producing uncleanable surfaces that can harbor bacteria that could be deadly to your pet. If you have metal enclosures or surfaces you should use a quaternary ammonia sanitizer or ask your veterinarian for advice on other available sanitizers. Chlorine/bleach sanitizers have a very short shelf life. You will need to mix a fresh solution each time you clean the enclosure, but they are relatively inexpensive and can be purchased at any grocery store.

Quats
Quaternary Ammonia sanitizers are available at most restaurant supply stores. They may be more expensive than bleach but will also have a longer shelf life.

Do not use fragrant sanitizers
When purchasing sanitizers, it is important to select the unscented types. Fragrances could be harmful to your pet.
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 animals to roam around in the classroom excluding therapy animals
- Do not allow food or drink in animal contact areas
- Do not allow animals where food and drink are prepared and served
- Contact parents regarding any allergies and obtain parental consent forms
- Report any bites, scratches, or allergies to the school nurse and the student’s parent, (Bites must be reported to FCPH w/in 24 hours)
CLASSROOM PET FORM
FORM TO BE COMPLETED BY PRIMARY CLASSROOM TEACHER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher(s) Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type and quantity of animal proposed:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide a brief explanation of how the animal will be used to achieve learning objectives in your classroom:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PRINCIPAL VETERINARIAN WHO HAS EXAMINED PROPOSED ANIMAL:

| Name:                   |
| Clinic Address:         |
| Phone:                  |
| Are the animal(s) up to date on vaccines recommended by primary veterinarian? |

What type of enclosure will be used to house the animal(s)?

How often will the animal(s)' enclosure be cleaned and sanitized?

What type of sanitizer will be used when sanitizing the enclosure?

Is food properly stored in a rigid sealed container?  

Will students be permitted to handle animal(s), and will students be given care or cleaning responsibilities for animal(s)?  

If so, have parents signed permission slips for such activities?  

What arrangements have been made for the animal(s) care over weekends, holidays, and summer recess?  

What arrangements have been made if the animal needs to be removed from the classroom permanently?  

Franklin County Public Health
PETS in the classroom

School: ____________________________  Date: ____________________________

Class: ____________________________  Instructor(s) Name: ___________________________

Classroom: ____________________________

The specific animal(s) planned to live in the classroom are:

The specific animal(s) planned to visit the classroom for one day during the school year are:

The pet for your student’s classroom may aid in achieving the following learning objectives:

Should you have any concerns regarding this animal (ex. student allergies, other medical sensitivities, sanitation practices, etc.) you may contact:

INFORMATION BELOW TO BE COMPLETED BY A PARENT OR GUARDIAN

In addition to this notification, we would like to ask whether you would like your student to participate in any of the following activities (check all that apply):

[ ] I give permission for my child to handle the animals and feed the animals. (Children will NOT be cleaning or handling the animal feces, nor will the animal feces be near any food or sleeping surfaces.)

[ ] I do not give permission for my child to handle the animals and feed the animals. I acknowledge that I have been informed of plans for my student’s classroom to house animals as specified above.

I, ____________________________, acknowledge that I have been informed of plans for my student, (_____________________________)’s, classroom to house a classroom pet as specified above.

Furthermore, I consent to my student’s participation in activities specified above.

X ____________________________ (parent signature)

(Note: As a sign of good faith, we have included an informational brochure and animal complaint form provided by Franklin County Public Health. Should you have any concerns regarding this situation you may contact either the school’s principal directly at ____________________________, or file a complaint or inquiry with Franklin Public Health.)

Child’s Name: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________

TO NOTIFY YOU IF ANIMALS ARE GOING TO BE PRESENT IN THE CLASSROOM
Resources

American Veterinary Medical Association (2015) • U.S. Pet Ownership Statistics:

Pets in the classroom study:

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

Pets and other animal:

Prioritizing zoonotic diseases for multisectoral one health collaboration in the US:
https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/pdfs/us-ohzdp-report-508

Franklin County Public Health • Classroom pets: www.myfcph.org

PetSmart • Teacher’s Guide to Classroom Pets:

The Center for Food Security and Public Health: Iowa State University • Pets in the Classroom:

The Pet Care Trust • Pets in the Classroom:
https://www.petsintheclassroom.org/benefits-of-classroom-animals/