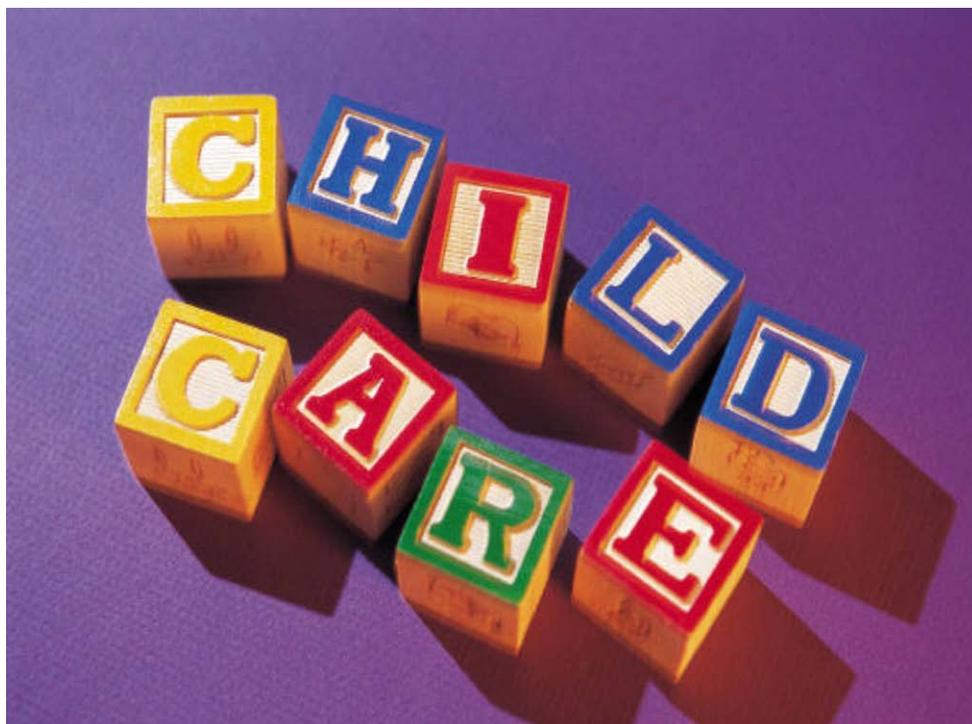


# Animals in Child Care Facilities

Maryland State Department of Education  
Division of Early Childhood Development  
Office of Child Care

## Resource Guide



2012

Replaces Circular Letter #96-09 Animals in Child Care Facilities (September 26, 2006)

## Guidance

### Animals in Child Care Facilities

The following procedures help to prevent disease and ensure the health and safety of children in child care facilities. Where animals are housed and their accessibility is paramount to child safety. Adults must always be present when children are exposed to animals, and children must be taught safe procedures to follow when in close proximity to animals.

1. **Hand-washing:** Hands must be washed after handling animals.
2. **Parent notification:** Some children may be allergic to animals or have fear of certain animals. Providers must inform parents of any animals on the premises prior to a child's admission to the facility, and as new animals are acquired. Providers must have parents sign a contract addendum giving permission to have children near animals.
3. **Supervision:** If any animal, including a dog or cat, demonstrates aggressive behavior, including but not limited to biting and scratching, the animal must be excluded from the child care areas and physically separated from the children. The provider or substitute may never walk away from the children and leave the children unattended with animals, including dogs and cats. The provider or substitute must always be close enough to intervene if an animal begins to display aggressive behavior.
4. **Restricted areas:** Animals must be prohibited from the following areas:
  - (a) Areas used for the storage of food, cooking utensils and dishes;
  - (b) Food preparation surfaces, including sinks, counters, and table tops;
  - (c) All birds are prohibited from kitchens and dining areas. (See item 14 for further restrictions applying to birds.)
5. **Animal cages/litter boxes:** When an animal is kept in a cage, the cage should be easily cleanable. Adults should clean cages and litter boxes daily or as necessary. Separate facilities are required for cleaning cages (kitchen sinks, food preparation and serving surfaces are not to be used). Hand-washing is mandatory after handling animals or animal waste.
6. **Animal food and supplies:** All animal food, equipment, and cleaning supplies should be kept separate from food service supplies and away from food preparation and serving surfaces.
7. **Animal waste:** Waste must be disposed of in a sanitary manner by adults. The waste must be kept away from food service areas and completely inaccessible to children.

8. **Animal health:** All animals should be properly immunized according to State and local requirements. Animals that appear ill or infested with external parasites (ticks, fleas, lice, etc.) must be inaccessible to children and prohibited from child care areas. Animals susceptible to rabies that cannot be inoculated must be kept totally inaccessible to children.
9. **Animal bites:** First aid should be administered, as appropriate, and immediate medical treatment obtained if necessary. Parents must be notified of animal bites and advised to contact children's physicians. In Maryland, it is mandatory to report all animal bites to the sheriff, police, or animal control.
10. **Wild animals:** Wild animals must be excluded from contact with children and from child care areas. This includes, but is not limited to, squirrels, rabbits, ducks, raccoons, turtles, and birds. Animals caught or found in the wild often have diseases and are hard to maintain.
11. **Ferrets:** Ferrets must be kept totally inaccessible to children based on the following:
  - (a) Many ferret attacks involve serious physical injury to the faces of infants or small children who were attacked as they slept in their cribs.
  - (b) A history of rabies vaccination does not eliminate the possibility of rabies infection. The period of viral shedding before the onset of rabies and the signs and symptoms of rabies in ferrets is not known.

"Public health officials...have not endorsed the ferret as a household companion based on two issues: reports of serious injuries inflicted by ferrets on infants and young children, and a lack of data on the pathogenesis of rabies in ferrets."<sup>1</sup>
12. **Reptiles:** All reptiles must be kept inaccessible to children. Reptiles are known to transmit salmonella to humans. The sale of turtles is prohibited in Maryland.
13. **Birds:** Psittacine birds (i.e. parakeets, parrots, macaws, and cockatiels) and other non-psittacine caged birds (i.e. pigeons, doves and myna birds) should not be located in areas used for child care. These birds frequently carry the bacteria that cause psittacosis. Birds such as finches and canaries are acceptable for child care areas.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologist, "Statement on Ferrets", National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, Inc., 22 April 1994,p.1

14. **Farm animals:** Farm animals such as sheep, cows, horses, goats, chickens, etc., shall be restricted from entering child care areas, including outdoor play areas, in order to keep these areas free of animal waste.
15. **Hatching chickens:** The hatching of chickens for educational purposes is permitted in child care facilities with the following restrictions:
  - (a) The eggs must be kept in a enclosed incubator for hatching so that children have no direct contact with the eggs and chicks;
  - (b) The hatched chicks are to be removed from child care areas when the children are not present and given homes (chicks are not to be maintained in child care areas);
  - (c) Incubators, eggs, and chicks must be kept out of food preparation and service areas (incubator components are not to be cleaned in the kitchen).
16. **Health and/or safety threat:** Any animal not included above that is found to pose a health and/or safety threat to children in child care facilities shall be excluded from child care areas and contact with children.

**TECHNICAL ASSITANCE:** If you have questions, contact Paula Johnson, Branch Chief, Licensing Branch, Office of Child Care at (410) 767-7805.

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