

Deciding to let animals into nursing homes needs careful consideration. Animals can benefit residents, but they might also spread germs. Nursing homes must make sure that interactions between residents and animals are safe for both people and pets.

Point your phone's camera at the QR code for CDC's guidelines on animals in healthcare facilities.



Infection Prevention Checklist



1. **Develop policies and procedures related to animals in the facility:**
 - a. Address animal-assisted activities, animal-assisted therapy, resident animals, service animals, and personal pet visitation
 - b. Specify which animals are restricted (e.g., reptiles, amphibians, birds, rodents)
 - c. Establish cleaning of environmental surfaces after therapy sessions and routinely for animal dwellings
 - Preferably assigned to a staff member who does not provide resident care
 - d. Sample policy template from VDH: Animals in Healthcare Facilities Policy (<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/174/2024/09/Animals-in-Healthcare-Facilities-Policy-Template.docx>)
2. **Perform hand hygiene:** Residents, visitors, and staff should wash their hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer after contact with animals.
3. **Promptly clean and disinfect** any spills of animal waste or other body substances.
4. **Considerations around service animals:**
 - a. Facilities must generally allow service animals in all areas of the facility where the public is allowed to go unless the animal's presence:
 - Creates a fundamental alteration in services or
 - Poses a significant risk to the health or safety of others that cannot be reduced or eliminated by modifying practices or procedures.
 - Example: A facility may choose to limit a service animal from the room of a severely immunocompromised resident. Care of this resident requires strict adherence to hand hygiene and use of protective equipment. In this case, the animal's presence could compromise the environment.
 - b. Make decisions to exclude a service animal from a care area on a case-by-case basis. Evaluate the animal, the resident, and the clinical situation.
5. **Considerations around animal-assisted activities, animal-assisted therapy, and resident animals:**
 - a. Animals' health and behavior status should be regularly re-evaluated. Ensure animals are clean, well-groomed, and healthy:
 - Free of fleas, ticks, and worms

- No unhealed wounds or lesions
- Up to date with recommended immunizations (i.e., rabies) and preventive medications (e.g., heartworm prevention)
- Greater than one year old
- b. Animal handlers should be appropriately trained to conduct the animal-assisted activity or therapy, receive site-specific orientation, and be in good health.
- c. Ensure residents can interact with animals safely.
 - Exclude residents with open wounds or burns, open tracheotomy, immunosuppression, or those on transmission-based precautions
 - Consider allergies, asthma, and phobias
 - Have residents agreed to have the animal in the facility?
 - Avoid direct contact with animal urine or feces
 - Animal therapists and handlers must take precautions to prevent animal bites
 - Resident animal programs should restrict animals from:
 - Food preparation kitchens
 - Laundry areas
 - Clean supply storage areas
 - Medication preparation areas
- d. Care for animals responsibly:
 - Determine how the staff will provide care for the animals
 - Who is responsible?
 - Where will animal supplies (e.g., food) be stored?
 - How will animal waste be properly disposed?

Additional Resources



American Veterinary Medical Association – Animal-Assisted Interventions:

<https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/service-emotional-support-and-therapy-animals/animal-assisted-interventions-guidelines>

- Guidelines for designing a wellness program, preventive medical strategies, and preventive behavioral strategies

Americans with Disabilities Act Requirements – Service Animals: <https://www.ada.gov/resources/service-animals-2010-requirements/>

- More information about service animals

Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America – Animals in Healthcare Facilities: Recommendations to Minimize Potential Risks <https://tinyurl.com/animalsinhealthcare>

- Expert guidance to the medical community about the management of animals in healthcare