



Arizona Department of Agriculture

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NEWS RELEASE ***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

RELEASE DATE: October 9, 2015
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PETTING ZOOS: SAFETY FOR FAMILY AND ANIMALS **Illnesses pass from animal to people and from people to animals**

The Arizona Department of Agriculture embraces the importance of county, state and national fairs. There is much more to a fair than rides and deep fried food. Experiences available at fairs provide an incredible opportunity for children and adults to learn where the food on their table comes from and how well cared for livestock is. The animal competitions and petting zoos rekindle the true nature of a fair.

“The barns and exhibitions at fairs welcome urban visitors, and participants enjoy bragging about their prize animals and what those animals mean to the food chain,” said Mark Killian, director of the Arizona Department of Agriculture. “However people need to remember animals carry disease and are susceptible to human disease.”

The Arizona Exposition and State Fair has several handwashing and hand sanitizing stations. If you don't see one, ask a fair employee.

With the cooler weather, you may consider hiring a petting zoo for a family reunion or birthday party.

No matter where you come in contact with animals, you should take steps to protect your children, yourself and animals:

- Wash hands before and after visiting the barns.
- Avoid touching the ground or straw in the pens where germs may linger.
- Avoid animal exhibitions if you are sick, especially with a respiratory disease.

One significant concern is the spread of respiratory diseases between people and animals. You may remember the influenza pandemic from 2009. That specific virus developed when a human virus merged with a flu pig virus.

If you hire a petting zoo, check to see if it is registered with the USDA. The [Animal Care](#) program of the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service provides an [online database](#). You can also check with the West Region at (494) 970-7478 or email at acwest@aphis.usda.gov.

If you have a problem with a petting zoo, you can register a [complaint](#) with the USDA.

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