Work Place Hazards in Working with Animals

This fact sheet is for secondary school students undertaking work experience programs, and for their host employers. It can be used as a tool to assist with task planning, and to develop appropriate induction, training and supervision to minimise any risk to students while they are ‘at work’.

**Students must be given an induction addressing health and safety issues, and must be supervised at all times. Hazards must be considered when allocating tasks. If a risk cannot be managed, students must NOT undertake the activity.**

The hazards described here are commonly encountered in workplaces where animals are housed and/or treated: these include veterinary practices, wildlife sanctuaries and parks, zoos, animal shelters, stables, boarding facilities, pet shops.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hazard</th>
<th>Possible Harmful Effects</th>
<th>Possible Employer Action to Prevent Injury / Illness</th>
<th>Preventative Action Students Can Take</th>
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</table>
| Animals                                   | Bites, mauling, scratches (smaller animals) and Impact injuries such as fractures, crushing, bruising (larger animals) | Allow only experienced and trained staff to handle or restrain animals  
Instruct staff in safe animal handling, including recognising ‘warning’ signs  
Label cages where an animal’s behaviour gives reason for concern  
Provide personal protective clothing | Students must NOT handle animals unless the animal and the task have been assessed by their supervisor  
Don’t approach any animal unless assured by your supervisor that it’s safe |
| Autoclaves / sterilisers                  | Burns, scalding from steam                                                              | Ensure that only trained and experienced staff operate autoclaves  
Ensure regular plant maintenance                                                                 | Students must NOT be exposed to any dangerous plant or equipment |
| Animal enclosures, stalls and cages       | Cuts from metal edges, manual handling injury, risk of infection and disease if areas housing animals are not frequently cleaned and disinfected | Ensure regular cleaning and maintenance  
Assess manual handling and redesign cages to minimise risk  
Provide wash-up facilities, instruct staff in personal hygiene | Don’t open enclosures, stalls or cages for any purpose unless the task (and the animal) has been assessed by your supervisor  
Wear gloves when cleaning |
| Hazardous substances (drugs used in treatment, anaesthetics, cleaning chemicals) | Cytoxic (cancer treating) and other drugs can cause illness. Short-term effects can include nausea, headaches | Follow strict handling, labelling and storage procedures for all hazardous substances  
Provide protective clothing (such as gloves) for staff | Students must not medicate animals or handle any drugs used in animal treatment  
Wear rubber gloves when using cleaning chemicals |
| Hazardous waste (soiled towels, swabs, syringes etc.) | Infectious diseases, cuts or ‘needle stick’ injuries; irritation to skin, eyes, nose or throat | Treat all waste as hazardous  
Arrange for safe disposal into labelled containers  
Provide gloves where needed | Wear rubber gloves when handling soiled material  
Don’t handle syringes  
Adopt good hygiene practices |
| Housekeeping                              | Slips, trips and falls as a result of slippery surfaces or things left on the floor or on the ground | Ensure that spills are cleaned immediately  
Keep work areas clear of items that could present impact hazards | Follow procedures for cleaning up spills  
Report any spills or obstacles |
| Manual handling                           | Musculoskeletal injuries (sprains and strains)                                           | Assess every manual handling task  
Use mechanical aids or team lifts  
Train workers in manual handling | Don’t attempt any task if you think it may be difficult to do safely – ask for help! |
| X-rays (radiation)                         | Significant health risks, including cancers                                               | Minimise potential for exposure to X-rays during radiography                                                        | Students must NOT be exposed to radiography processes |
| Zoonoses (diseases caught from animals)    | Diseases including hydatid disease, ringworm, Q fever                                     | Minimise potential for zoonotic infections – training, safe work practices, vaccination | Always wash up after contact with animals  
Students must NOT enter any workplace where Q fever has been reported |
| Cuts                                      | Infection                                                                               | Ensure tasks with potential risk of cuts are assessed  
Provide protective gloves  
Provide appropriate washing facilities | Wear protective gloves  
Wash hands immediately  
Seek first aid immediately if needed |
| Allergies to animals or insects (or to animal feeds such as grasses) | Allergic reactions: asthma or other respiratory illness, skin reactions | Document any known allergies among staff members  
Prevent or minimise exposure – procedures must be established and followed by all workers  
Provide protective clothing | Follow safe working procedures  
Report any suspected allergic reaction to your supervisor, without delay |
| Sexual harassment, work place bullying    | Emotional stress, fear and anxiety, physical illness                                     | Establish work place policy  
Provide staff briefings or training | Report any concerns immediately |