



Hand gels no substitute for handwashing on farm visits

Anyone who is visiting a farm attraction should not rely on sanitising hand gels or wipes to protect themselves or their children against germs that may be present in animal dirt around the farm.

Although the risk of becoming unwell is very low in light of the millions of farm visits every year there are occasional outbreaks of gastrointestinal disease which are linked to visits to farm attractions. The route of infection in these outbreaks is generally through contact with germs from animal droppings. These germs can be ingested when people, especially children, put their fingers in their mouths.

To reduce the risk of illness, both adults and children should thoroughly wash their hands using soap and water after they have handled animals or touched surfaces at the farm and always before eating or drinking. Hand gels can't remove contamination in the manner that soap and water can.

Research published by the then Health Protection Agency of a review of 55 outbreaks of intestinal disease linked to petting farms over a 17 year period showed that one of the risk factors associated with illness was the reliance on hand gels instead of handwashing. Over the period of the study, 1,328 people were reported to have fallen ill following a farm visit, of whom 113 were hospitalised. Illness ranged from mild through to severe diarrhoea and occasionally more serious conditions.

Hand gels have their use in areas which are generally clean, for example offices or hospitals, but are not effective in killing bugs such as *E. coli* or cryptosporidium which can be found in animal droppings and on contaminated surfaces around farms.

Visitors should be aware that using sanitising gels is not a substitute for washing hands as gels may fail to remove contamination in the way that soap and running water can.

Whilst using sanitising gels following handwashing with soap and water may provide extra benefit many farm attractions have removed hand gels from their sites as experience has shown some visitors will ignore handwashing facilities and just use gels.

Source: HSE