

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

CLASSROOM ANIMALS

Although classroom pets can be great teaching tools, they can also bring unseen and unanticipated hazards to students. All pets, whether water bound or cute and furry, can expose children to diseases and airborne respiratory irritants. For example, turtles and other reptiles are notorious carriers of salmonella, and bird and rodent feces are common routes of exposures to various diseases.

When you are deciding to allow an animal in your classroom, consider these factors first:

Allergens/Respiratory Irritants

Whether you have the family dog in the classroom, a dwarf rabbit or a gerbil, their fur and hair dander become airborne. Janitorial cleaning duties can easily double to reduce airborne exposures from animals in the classroom. Cooperation between janitorial staff and the teacher helps keep irritants at bay, but the airborne particulates can still make their way through an entire school's ventilation system.

Diseases/Viruses

All animals can serve as host carriers for numerous parasites, viruses and diseases. Some diseases can spread from animal to human in a process known as zoonosis. Although cats and dogs have standard vaccinations that your local veterinarian administers, small animals like gerbils, hamsters, rabbits, amphibians and reptiles do not. In addition, unless kept clean and confined to cages, animals can track germs from their feces to any surface they are allowed to touch. Rat, rabbit and even bird feces are frequent carriers of a wide array of diseases. These germs can become airborne during normal cage cleanings.



Animals in the classroom can be an effective learning tool for students. But PACE suggests that animals be visitors, not residents in the classroom. This helps reduce the exposure time to staff and students while still providing an educational benefit. It also reduces the amount of time that may be needed for care and cleaning.



If you decide to have an animal in the classroom, PACE recommends you follow these guidelines:

- Clean the animal's cage frequently and thoroughly when students are not present. It is imperative that feces are confined to a limited space that does not expose children or allow feces and dander to become unnecessarily airborne.
- Adults should always supervise student contact with animals in the classroom. It is preferred that children not handle or feed animals to prevent biting or scratching. If animal contact is necessary, no more than one or two students should handle the animal at a time to prevent erratic behavior by the animal from stress.
- Make sure that all cage and aquarium lids are secured to prevent students from opening cages or animals accidentally escaping. Open lids, cages and free-roaming animals are not recommended.
- If students are handling animals in the classroom, they should wash their hands both before and after touching the animal. Hands should be scrubbed with warm water and soap for a minimum of 20 seconds to help reduce the spread of disease.
- It is important that organizations adopt a policy outlining guidelines for classroom animals and administer it fairly.

Additional information on pets is available from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/pets/index.html>



If you have additional questions or need further assistance, please reach out to PACE Risk Management at riskmanagement@sdao.com.

PACE RISK MANAGEMENT

1-800-285-5461 • PACE.OSBA.ORG • RISKMANAGEMENT@SDAO.COM

[Home](#) → [Resources](#) → [Safety](#) → [Incident Reporting Materials](#)