

ANIMALS IN SCHOOLS  
(Based on State of Vermont Model Policy)

**Animals Prohibited from School:**

Rabies is now endemic in Vermont's raccoon and fox populations. Any fur-bearing animal is susceptible to this very serious fatal disease and, if infected, can transmit it to students and staff. The risk in a school or other group setting is that a single wild animal or unvaccinated pet carrying rabies has the potential to expose a large number of children.

The Vermont Department of Health recommends that the following animals be prohibited from schools:

**Wild Animals and Domestic Stray Animals** - Wild animals pose a risk for transmitting rabies as well as other zoonotic diseases (disease which can be transmitted from animals to people) and, therefore, should not be allowed in schools or handled by staff and children. Because of the high incidence of rabies in bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes and other wild carnivores, these animals should not be permitted on school grounds under any circumstances (including dead animals).

**Pet Dogs, Cats, Wolf-Hybrids, Ferrets and Farm Animals** - These pets do not belong in the school. They may pose a risk for transmitting rabies, as well as parasites, fleas, other diseases and injuries.

**Bat Houses** - Bats pose a high risk for transmitting rabies. Bat houses should not be installed on school grounds.

**Exception: Guide, Hearing and Other Service Dogs or Law Enforcement Dogs** - These animals may be allowed in school or on school grounds with proof of current rabies vaccination.

**Guidelines for Other Animals:**

Each school will determine whether the following animals are allowed or prohibited. Any animal that is allowed in the school or on school grounds must be clean and healthy so that the risk of their transmitting disease to students and teachers is minimal. Any education with animals should also be used to reemphasize proper hygiene and hand washing recommendations.

No animals should be allowed in food preparation areas at any time. Food handlers should not be responsible for clean-up of animal wastes, and cages and tanks should not be cleaned in food handling areas.

Animal cages or tanks should be cleaned thoroughly on a regular basis. Students should not be allowed to handle or clean up any form of animal waste (feces, urine, blood, etc.) and wastes should be disposed of in a plastic bag or container with a lid. Anyone who cleans a cage or tank should wash their hands immediately after completing the task.

Children with allergies or those with immune deficiencies may be especially susceptible to diseases transmitted by animals or allergic reactions; therefore, special precautions may be needed to minimize risks. Consultation with the school nurse and the child's parents about precautionary measures is strongly advised.

**Birds** - Psittacosis is a serious disease that infected birds can transmit to humans. Even birds that appear healthy can be carriers of this disease. Because of the risk of psittacosis, birds (especially parrots, parakeets, macaws, pigeons, doves, etc.) should not be handled by children and should never be allowed to fly free in the classroom.

**Reptiles and Amphibians** - Reptiles (iguanas, snakes, lizards, and turtles) and amphibians (frogs, salamanders and toads) can spread salmonella to humans, resulting in diarrhea and fever. This disease can be life-threatening in very young children, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems. These animals should not be handled by children, pregnant women or individuals with infants at home. Anyone handling a reptile or amphibian should wash their hands thoroughly immediately following contact.

**Chicks and Ducks** - Chicks and ducks can spread salmonella to humans. This disease can be life threatening in very young children, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems. These animals should not be handled by children, pregnant women or individuals with infants at home. Anyone handling chicks or ducks should wash their hands thoroughly immediately following contact.

**Poisonous Animals** - Spiders, venomous insects and poisonous snakes, reptiles and lizards may be prohibited for safety reasons.

**Guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils, rabbits** - Healthy guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils and rabbits pose a limited health risk. Such animals may be allowed as classroom pets or as occasional visitors with advance notification to the principal and teacher and under the strict supervision of an adult. Even tame animals may react aggressively in strange situations; therefore, student contact with animals should

always be closely supervised and animals should not be allowed to run loose in the classroom.

Children should not be allowed to “kiss” these animals and should not be allowed to handle or cleanup any form of the animal’s waste or clean the animal’s cage. Anyone handling such animals should wash their hands thoroughly immediately following contact.

**Fish** - Fish pose a very limited health risk and may be allowed in the classroom. Disposable gloves should be worn when cleaning aquariums and tank water should not be disposed of in sinks that are used for food preparation or drinking water.

### **Implementing and Communicating the Animal Regulation**

To effectively protect students and staff, this animal regulation and accompanying policy must be followed by the entire school community. Parents, teachers, school nurses and other staff must be reminded of the policy on a regular basis and know of its provisions.

APPROVED: Norwich 4 May 2000