

# Animals in Ohio long- term care facilities

**Keep residents safe  
while enjoying pets**

**A guide for administrators,  
activity coordinators and families**



**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**

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# Risks and benefits

Animals can provide many benefits to your residents.

- More than 80 percent of directors believe that pets were useful in calming agitated residents and residents were happier after interacting with animals.\*
- Incorporating animals into your facility often creates a home-like environment, decreasing loneliness and social isolation.

There are some risks associated with animals.

- Animals can carry diseases, and residents of long-term care facilities are at higher risk of getting sick from these diseases.
- Animals can injure your residents with bites and scratches, and may cause falls.
- A recent study\* revealed some gaps in protocols surrounding animals in long-term care facilities.

You can maximize benefits and reduce risks in your facility by taking some simple steps: 1) choose the best animal; 2) ensure safe interactions between people and animals; 3) require evidence of proper animal care; and 4) create animal safety and cleanliness protocols for your facility.

\*Survey conducted by J.W. Stull & T. Landers, The Ohio State University



# Choosing the best animal for your facility

Choose good-natured animals to avoid bites and scratches.

- Choose animals with advanced training and use certified animals when possible.

Allow domestic animals like cats, dogs and fish. Avoid animals that have a higher chance of making residents sick such as reptiles, amphibians, rodents and exotic species.

- Turtles, frogs and other reptiles and amphibians commonly carry bacteria called *Salmonella*, which can cause severe illness in some people, especially those with a compromised immune system.
- Rodents, farm animals and exotic animals such as hedgehogs can also frequently transmit diseases.

Age matters: keep residents safe by using only mature animals.

- Choose cats and dogs over the age of one year. At that age they are less likely to bite, scratch, or carry disease.





## Ensure safe interactions between residents and animals

Supervise residents to ensure they are petting animals in a manner that makes the animal comfortable; this can prevent injury and disease.

Discourage animals giving your residents “kisses.” Animals’ mouths carry many bacteria that can make people sick.

Create animal restricted areas: these areas should include bathrooms, dining areas and rooms of sick residents because residents are at a greater health risk here.

- Discourage animal visits with patients who have signs of illness such as open wounds and acute diarrhea.

Ensure all residents wash their hands before and after touching animals.

- This protects your residents, as well as the animals, because many diseases can also be transmitted from people to animals.

# Caring for animals living in or visiting your facility

Ensure all animals regularly visit a veterinarian.

- Ensure all animals are healthy.
- Require the use of products to keep animals free of fleas, ticks and worms.
- Ensure animals have a safe, clean living space.

Require animals be fed commercially prepared diets. Raw meat and egg diets can increase the risk of disease. Avoid feeding table scraps, snacks or candy.

Confirm all animals are regularly bathed and nails are trimmed. This can decrease diseases and sources of allergens.

Ensure someone at your facility is responsible for creating, implementing and monitoring your protocol. This written document should include the topics mentioned in this brochure: choose the best animals, ensure safe interactions and proper animal care.\*

Share your protocols with all staff, residents, family members and visitors.

\*A model animal protocol can be found at [go.osu.edu/nhpets](http://go.osu.edu/nhpets).



# Want more information?

Did you know that Ohio requires written protocols regarding some animals in long-term care facilities?

Review the Ohio Revised Code 3701-17-09.

Ohio State has created a model animal protocol to help protect the health, safety and rights of your residents.

This protocol can be found at:

[go.osu.edu/nhpets](http://go.osu.edu/nhpets)

Visit the following sites for additional information:

Worms and Germs Blog

[wormsandgermsblog.com](http://wormsandgermsblog.com)

Centers for Disease Control  
and Prevention

[cdc.gov/zoonotic/gi/animals.html](http://cdc.gov/zoonotic/gi/animals.html)



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Information contained in this brochure is a synthesis of multiple studies.  
Refer to website for references: [go.osu.edu/nhpets](http://go.osu.edu/nhpets).