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## COVID-19 GUIDANCE: Critical Animal Contact

This document does not provide additional requirements for businesses that have animal contact. In accordance with Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) emergency regulations, businesses and organizations must prepare and implement a COVID-19 Control Plan. A checklist and template can be found at [ReopeningRI.com](https://www.reopeningri.com). The RIDOH emergency regulations can be found [here](#). Guidance for [Farmers Markets](#) can be found [here](#). The [Recreation guidance](#) can also be found on [ReopeningRI.com](https://www.reopeningri.com). The State prepared a [guidance document](#) to assist organizations in meeting the requirements outlined in these RIDOH regulations.

The guidelines below summarize information and steps that the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) is encouraging people who have frequent animal contact (e.g. pets, farmers, horses) and who are wondering what they can and should do during the current COVID-19 pandemic. The [CDC Guidance](#) provides additional information on the virus in animals, including information on signs of disease, testing, and susceptibility of various species of animals.

### General Guidance

- **Screening:** All persons (customers, riders, veterinarians, nutritional consultants, insemination technicians, farriers, riding instructors or other similar persons) should be screened for symptoms of illness. Persons who are determined to be sick should be sent home and not have any contact with animals at the facility.
- **Physical distancing:** Whenever possible, physical distancing of six (6) feet between people should be followed when outside of the home.
- **Groups:** Groups sizes should be limited in size in accordance with current executive orders.
- **Face coverings:** All persons should wear a face covering in accordance with current RIDOH regulations and executive orders. In addition, a cloth face covering should be worn at all times while having contact with animals unless the animals live in the same household as the person having contact.
- **Hand cleaning:** All persons must have access to soap and water and/or hand sanitizer. Always wash hands with soap and water immediately after touching any

animal. If soap and water are not available, using hand sanitizer that has at least 60% alcohol is recommended.

- **Clean footwear:** Anyone providing animal care at multiple locations should clean and disinfect footwear immediately before having contact with animals, and again immediately after leaving all animal housing areas on the premises. In the alternative, use of disposable foot coverings before entering any animal housing on a premises and removing and disposing of those foot coverings immediately after leaving all animal housing on that premises.
- **Coveralls:** Anyone providing animal care at multiple locations should wear either clean coveralls or disposable coveralls prior to contact with any animal(s) on a premises. Coveralls should be removed prior to entering a vehicle for travel. Washable coveralls should be placed in a plastic bag and laundered before reusing. Disposable coveralls should be discarded at the premises where the animal contact occurred.
- **Cleaning procedures:** Public areas and high-touch points should be cleaning in accordance with RIDOH regulations and [CDC guidelines](#).
- **Non-Critical contact:** Non-critical contact ( contact that is not necessary to the health and welfare of the animal(s)) between animals and people should be avoided when possible. If non-critical contact cannot be avoided, the contact should be limited to the minimum amount necessary for the care of the animal(s).

#### **Guidance for Pet Animal Contact:**

- **Pet exercise:** Physical distancing of six (6) feet between people should be followed when exercising pets.
- **Gatherings:** Public places where large number of pets and people may gather (e.g. dog parks) should be avoided to avoid people coming into close contact with each other or with pets they don't own.
- **Limit interactions:** Interactions between people and pets or other animals outside their household should be minimized.
- **Additional cleaning:** In addition to the encouraged cleaning by the CDC and cleaning RIDOH, the following items should be cleaned and disinfected on a frequent basis: leashes, grooming equipment, toys, training aids, countertops, railings, door knobs, and computer keyboards.

#### **Guidance for Livestock:**

Currently, there is no evidence that viruses, including the virus that causes COVID-19, can spread to people from the skin, fur, or hair of animals. However, until we know more about how the COVID-19 virus affects livestock, the same principals and precautions one uses around people to prevent the spread of COVID-19 should be followed.

- **Limit contact:** Limit the number of people caring for livestock to the minimum number necessary for their care.
- **Closed Herds:** Maintain “closed herds” by not introducing new animals into an established herd. If new animals must be added, they should be isolated away from other animals in the herd in a manner sufficient to prevent introduction of disease. This is considered a best management practice and not specific to COVID-19.
- **Additional cleaning:** In addition to the cleaning encouraged by the CDC and RIDOH, the following should be cleaned and disinfected on a frequent basis: gates, door knobs, animal handling and restraint equipment, computer keyboards and farm equipment.

### **Guidance for Equestrian Activities:**

Currently, there is no evidence that viruses, including the virus that causes COVID-19, can spread to people from the skin, fur, or hair of animals. However, until we know more about how the COVID-19 virus affects horses and other equines, the same principals and precautions one uses around people to prevent the spread of COVID-19 should be followed.

- **Limit contact:** Limit the number of people caring for horses to the minimum number necessary for their care.
- **Closed herds:** Maintain “closed herds” by not introducing new animals into an established herd. If new animals must be added, they should be isolated away from other animals in the herd in a manner sufficient to prevent introduction of disease. This is considered a best management practice and not specific to COVID-19.
- **Additional cleaning:** In addition to the cleaning encouraged by the CDC and RIDOH , the following should be cleaned and disinfected on a frequent basis: lead ropes, halters, tack, grooming equipment, stall latches, gates, wheelbarrow and manure fork handles, door knobs, and computer keyboards.

### **Determination of Whether Animal Contact is Critical:**

To determine whether animal contact is considered critical, based upon the guidance provided above, use of the following questions:

- Is this contact necessary for the health, productivity, or welfare of the animal(s)?
- Is this contact limited to the fewest number of people who are necessary to have contact with the animal(s)?
- Can current physical distancing and sanitation requirements be maintained while I am having contact with the animal(s)?

If any of the above questions are answered “no,” the contact is considered non-critical and should be avoided.