



For immediate release

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Pat the animals – then wash your hands!
Portable sinks help you stay healthy at farms, zoos, festivals & fairs

SNOHOMISH COUNTY, Wash. --- Look for the sinks and hand washing stations where they make the most sense for washing germs down the drain: Next to animal exhibits, dining areas, bathrooms, and food concessions.

“Wash your hands and your children’s hands after contact with animals or their habitat, after a bathroom visit, after changing a diaper -- and BEFORE eating,” said Dr. Gary Goldbaum, Health Officer and Director of the Snohomish Health District. “It’s a simple precaution, but keeping those germs out of your mouth is the key to staying healthy.”

Animals naturally carry E. coli 0157 and other bacteria that cause illness in humans. In the summer, the Health District often receives reports of illness associated with animal contact.

This month four people were diagnosed with E. coli infections following contact with animals at the Forest Park Animal Farm, which is one of about a dozen such venues in the county. Each year, between 20 and 40 cases of E. coli infection are reported in Snohomish County.

The Animal Farm is in compliance with state regulations for petting farms. The Parks Department staff immediately implemented recommendations made by the Health District to enhance the safety and cleanliness of the petting area, such as increasing the amount of bleach in the cleaning solution, removing calves from the open yard and increasing barriers between children and some animal pens.

Dr. Goldbaum stressed that parents need to make sure their kids wash their hands in soapy water for at least 15 seconds. “That’s about the time it takes to sing a verse of ‘Old MacDonald Had a Farm.’”

E. coli 0157 causes intestinal illness, including abdominal cramps, bloody diarrhea, and vomiting. Symptoms usually develop within 2-5 days after exposure. About five percent of patients develop a kidney problem called hemolytic uremic syndrome, which can be fatal.

“If you show these symptoms, contact your health care provider and mention that you visited a petting zoo,” said Dr. Goldbaum.

Established in 1959, the Snohomish Health District works for a safer and healthier community through disease prevention, health promotion, and protection from environmental threats. Find more information about local public health programs and services at www.snohd.org. **###END###**