

# Work Place Hazards in Working with Animals

This fact sheet is for students undertaking work experience programs, and for their host employers. It can be used as a tool to assist with task planning, and to develop appropriate induction, training and supervision to minimise any risk to students while they are 'at work'.

**Students must be given an induction addressing health and safety issues, and must be supervised at all times. Hazards must be considered when allocating tasks. If a risk cannot be managed, students must NOT undertake the activity.**

The hazards described here are commonly encountered in workplaces where animals are housed and/or treated: these include veterinary practices, wildlife sanctuaries and parks, zoos, animal shelters, stables, boarding facilities, pet shops.

Hazard	Possible Harmful Effects	Possible Employer Action to Prevent Injury / Illness	Preventative Action Students Can Take
Animals <i>Even usually placid animals may inflict injury if under stress or in pain. Animal behaviour is difficult to predict and may change without warning</i>	Bites, mauling, scratches (smaller animals) and Impact injuries such as fractures, crushing, bruising (larger animals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Allow only experienced and trained staff to handle or restrain animals</li> <li>◆ Instruct staff in safe animal handling, including recognising 'warning' signs</li> <li>◆ Label cages where an animal's behaviour gives reason for concern</li> <li>◆ Provide personal protective clothing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Students must NOT handle animals unless the animal and the task have been assessed by their supervisor</b></li> <li>◆ Don't approach any animal unless assured by your supervisor that it's safe</li> </ul>
Autoclaves / sterilisers	Burns, scalding from steam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Ensure that only trained and experienced staff operate autoclaves</li> <li>◆ Ensure regular plant maintenance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Students must NOT be exposed to any dangerous plant or equipment</b></li> </ul>
Animal enclosures, stalls and cages	Cuts from metal edges, manual handling injury, risk of infection and disease if areas housing animals are not frequently cleaned and disinfected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Ensure regular cleaning and maintenance</li> <li>◆ Assess manual handling and redesign cages to minimise risk</li> <li>◆ Provide wash-up facilities, instruct staff in personal hygiene</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Don't open enclosures, stalls or cages for any purpose unless the task (and the animal) has been assessed by your supervisor</li> <li>◆ Wear gloves when cleaning</li> </ul>
Hazardous substances (drugs used in treatment, anaesthetics, cleaning chemicals)	Cytotoxic (cancer treating) and other drugs can cause illness. Short-term effects can include nausea, headaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Follow strict handling, labelling and storage procedures for all hazardous substances</li> <li>◆ Provide protective clothing (such as gloves) for staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Students must not medicate animals or handle any drugs used in animal treatment</li> <li>◆ Wear rubber gloves when using cleaning chemicals</li> </ul>
Hazardous waste (soiled towels, swabs, syringes etc.)	Infectious diseases, cuts or 'needle stick' injuries; irritation to skin, eyes, nose or throat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Treat all waste as hazardous</li> <li>◆ Arrange for safe disposal into labelled containers</li> <li>◆ Provide gloves where needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Wear rubber gloves when handling soiled material</li> <li>◆ Don't handle syringes</li> <li>◆ Adopt good hygiene practices</li> </ul>
Housekeeping	Slips, trips and falls as a result of slippery surfaces or things left on the floor or on the ground	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Ensure that spills are cleaned immediately</li> <li>◆ Keep work areas clear of items that could present impact hazards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Follow procedures for cleaning up spills</li> <li>◆ Report any spills or obstacles</li> </ul>
Manual handling	Musculoskeletal injuries (sprains and strains)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Assess every manual handling task</li> <li>◆ Use mechanical aids or team lifts</li> <li>◆ Train workers in manual handling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Don't attempt any task if you think it may be difficult to do safely – ask for help!</li> </ul>
X-rays (radiation)	Significant health risks, including cancers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Minimise potential for exposure to X-rays during radiography</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ <b>Students must NOT be exposed to radiography processes</b></li> </ul>
Zoonoses (diseases caught from animals)	Diseases including hydatid disease, ringworm, Q fever	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Minimise potential for zoonotic infections – training, safe work practices, vaccination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Always wash up after contact with animals</li> <li>◆ <b>Students must NOT enter any workplace where Q fever has been reported</b></li> </ul>
Cuts	Infection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Ensure tasks with potential risk of cuts are assessed</li> <li>◆ Provide protective gloves</li> <li>◆ Provide appropriate washing facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Wear protective gloves</li> <li>◆ Wash hands immediately</li> <li>◆ Seek first aid immediately if needed</li> </ul>
Allergies to animals or insects (or to animal feeds such as grasses)	Allergic reactions: asthma or other respiratory illness, skin reactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Document any known allergies among staff members</li> <li>◆ Prevent or minimise exposure – procedures must be established and followed by all workers</li> <li>◆ Provide protective clothing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Follow safe working procedures</li> <li>◆ Report any suspected allergic reaction to your supervisor, without delay</li> </ul>
Sexual harassment, work place bullying	Emotional stress, fear and anxiety, physical illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Establish work place policy</li> <li>◆ Provide staff briefings or training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Report any concerns immediately</li> </ul>

