

IAHAIO position statement Zoonoses and animal-assisted interventions

Considering that:

- there is a wide range of documented benefits arising from human-animal interactions and animal assisted interventions (AAI) including health, social, emotional and psychological benefits and that these are enhanced when good standards of animal welfare are met.¹;
- there is a degree of risk of zoonoses in AAI. Zoonotic diseases are those that can be passed between animals and humans. These include viral, bacterial, fungal and parasitic diseases.;
- there are many routes of transmission such as direct contact including injury, via ingestion of contaminated food or water, environmental contamination or by arthropod vectors.² ;
- the risk of the transfer of zoonotic disease in AAI is dependent on factors including:³
 - the age and health status of humans involved, for example the need for careful consideration of the suitability of immunocompromised patients and pregnant women to engage in AAI with certain species of animals
 - the age, health, temperament of the animals
 - the source of the animals and their region of origin
 - the species of animals
 - preventative veterinary measures e.g. vaccination, parasite control
 - hygiene measures e.g. handwashing and animal husbandry protocols etc ;
- in a planned multidisciplinary AAI program, following a carefully devised veterinary care protocol and involving low risk species, the reported incidence of zoonotic transfer has been found to be very low.⁴

IAHAIO advises:

A considered approach to AAI. Programme planners should be knowledgeable about the benefits of such interactions, whilst also recognising that potential risks need to be addressed.

In particular:

¹ Serpell J and McCune, S (Eds). 2012. Waltham Pocket Book of Human-Animal Interactions.

² (<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/101662/reporting/en>)

³ National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians: Compendium of Measures to Prevent Disease Associated with Animals in Public Settings, 2017 JAVMA vol 251, no 11. <https://doi.org/10.2460/javma.251.11.1268>

⁴ Lerner DurJava L. Pet Visitation, an infection control issue? In American Journal of Infection Control 1994 Vol 22, Issue 2

[https://doi.org/10.1016/0196-6553\(94\)90174-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/0196-6553(94)90174-0);

Stryler-Gordon R, Beall N, Anderson R. 1985 Fact and Fiction: Health risks associated with pets in nursing homes. Journal of Delta Society; Callisto publication: Healthy and safe human-animal relationships in Europe. 2014. Accessed <http://www.callistoproject.eu/callisto/>

1. IAHAIO advises that all programs delivering AAI should minimize the risk of zoonotic transfer by adopting clear protocols that are consistently applied. These include, but are not limited to:

- preparing written documentation/policies outlining how preventative measures to minimize the risk of zoonotic transfer are to be implemented in practice.
- the careful planning of the AAI program before implementation, involving a multidisciplinary approach, including the expertise of a licensed veterinarian and human health care practitioners relevant to the clients served. This to ensure:
 - careful selection and screening of suitable animals – in terms of health, zoonotic risk, temperament, behaviour, origin and suitability for the AAI task
 - particular attention to the higher zoonotic risks associated with farm species and poultry
 - particular attention to the very high associated risks with exotic species and wild animals⁵
 - careful consideration regarding suitability or possible unsuitability of human recipients/clients (for example, immunocompromised patients, including pregnant women) to engage in AAI with certain species of animal
 - the exclusion of animals fed on raw meat, raw fish or unpasteurised milk and any by-products of these foods, due to unacceptable risks of zoonoses⁶
- the ongoing assessment of animals involved in AAI by a licensed veterinarian, experienced in the species concerned, to ensure that good standards of animal welfare are adopted.

2. IAHAIO supports the following principles relating to zoonoses and AAI:

- the education of health care professionals involved in delivering AAI about the importance of implementing protocols designed to minimize the risk of zoonoses, as part of a 'One Health' approach⁷
- veterinary and animal behaviourist involvement in animal selection, screening, matching to AAI tasks, implementation of preventive health programs and on-going health assessments
- research into zoonotic disease and preventative measures as they relate to AAI
- keeping records of the incidence/prevalence of zoonotic disease in AAI programs
- the promotion of Responsible Pet Ownership⁸

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⁵ National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians: Compendium of Measures to Prevent Disease Associated with Animals in Public Settings, 2017 JAVMA vol 251, no 11. <https://doi.org/10.2460/javma.251.11.1268>

⁵ Warwick C, Arena P, Steedman C, Jessop M. A review of captive exotic animal-linked zoonoses. In *Journal of Environmental Health Research* 2012. Volume 12 Issue 1 http://emergentdisease.org/assets/documents/A_review_of_captive_exotic_animal_linked_zoonoses.pdf

⁵ Chomel BB, Belotto A, Meslin F. Wildlife, Exotic Pets, and Emerging Zoonoses. Centers for Disease Control *Emerging Infectious Diseases*. 2007;13(1):6. doi:10.3201/eid1301.060480.

⁵ IAHAIO White Paper, 2014, updated 2018 Definitions for Animal Assisted Intervention and Guidelines for Wellness of Animals Involved www.iahaio.org

⁶ Hellgren J, Hästö LS, Wikström C, Fernström L-L, Hansson I. Occurrence of Salmonella, Campylobacter, Clostridium and Enterobacteriaceae in raw meat-based diets for dogs *Veterinary Record* March 2019 doi: 10.1136/vr.105199

⁷ Recognizing that human health (including mental health via the human-animal bond phenomenon), animal health, and ecosystem health are inextricably linked, One Health seeks to promote, improve, and defend the health and well-being of all species by enhancing cooperation and collaboration between physicians, veterinarians, other scientific health and environmental professionals and by promoting strengths in leadership and management to achieve these goals. (<http://www.onehealthinitiative.com/mission.php>)

⁸ Responsible pet ownership aims to maintain a good level of animal health and welfare, to maximise physical and psychological benefits to people and to minimise the potential risks that companion animals may pose to the public, other animals, or the environment (<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/101662/reporting/en>)