



## **PETS IN CHILDCARE SETTINGS**

The benefits of pet ownership outweigh the risks, but precautions are encouraged. If you choose to have an animal in the childcare or school setting, follow the listed guidelines to decrease the risk of spreading disease. Check with your local health department or childcare licensing agency before bringing any pets to your childcare setting or school because there may be state and/or local regulations that must be followed.

### **General considerations**

- Inform parents/guardians of the benefits and potential risks associated with animals in the classroom.
- Consult with parents/guardians to determine special considerations needed for children with weakened immune systems and who have allergies or asthma.
- Notify parents/guardians of any child whose skin is broken by an animal bite or scratch.
- Supervise children when handling animals.

### **Types of pets allowed in childcare and school settings include:**

- Guinea pigs
- Gerbils/Hamsters
- Domestic-bred mice or rats
- Rabbits
- Dogs/Cats
- Birds (must be free of *Chlamydia psittaci*)
- Fish

### **Animals not recommended in school settings and not allowed for childcare**

- ferrets
- poultry (baby chicks and ducklings)
- non-human primates
- aggressive/ unpredictable animals, wild or domestic
- stray animals with unknown health and vaccination history
- venomous or toxin-producing spiders, insects, reptiles, and amphibians
- reptiles (lizards, turtles, snakes, iguanas)
- inherently dangerous animals
- mammals at higher risk of transmitting rabies

These animals are not allowed or recommended because:

- Reptiles and poultry can carry *Salmonella* bacteria and can be a source of infection to infants, children, and staff.
- Wild animals can be a source of infectious bacteria, parasites, viruses, and fungi. Biting incidents from animals are a concern especially from wild animals.
- In some municipalities, ordinances restrict wild/exotic animals and/or farm animals.

### **Where to keep pets**

- Keep pets in designated areas only. They should be separated from food preparation, food storage, or eating areas.
- Keep pets in clean living quarters. Cages should be covered, sturdy, and easy to clean, and they should sit on surfaces that are solid and easy to clean.

### **Care and maintenance**

- Develop and follow written procedures concerning the care and maintenance of pets with the advice of your veterinarian.
- Assure that pets are appropriately vaccinated, free of parasites (this includes ticks, fleas, and intestinal worms), and fungal skin infections (e.g., ringworm).
- Keep animals that are in good health and show no evidence of disease. Healthy animals make better pets.
  - Feed pets appropriate commercial foods on a regular basis and keep fresh water available at all times.
  - Keep bedding dry and clean.
  - Clean cages daily. School or childcare staff should do this – NOT children.
  - Use a janitorial area to wash and clean cages or aquariums. DO NOT use the kitchen or food service sinks.
  - Wash hands thoroughly after contact with animals and their cages.
- Minimize contact with urine and stool. Urine and stool not confined to an enclosed cage should be cleaned up immediately. Dispose of this waste in a covered container not accessible to children.
- **WASH HANDS IMMEDIATELY after handling animals and their stool/urine and their environments.**

- Check with local authorities (police) for regulations in your jurisdiction for appropriate disposal of a pet when it

dies.

- Avoid changing cat litter boxes, handling animals, and contacting their environments if you are pregnant.
- Cover children's sandboxes when not in use.

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### 15A NCAC 18A .2831 ANIMAL AND VERMIN CONTROL

(a) Unrestrained animals, except those used in supervised activities or pet therapy programs, shall not be allowed in a child care center, including the outdoor learning environment. When animals are on the premises, copies of vaccination records required by North Carolina law and local ordinances shall be available for review. Any animals kept as pets shall be examined by a veterinarian to determine that they are free from vermin, such as mites, lice, fleas, and ticks, and pathogens that could adversely affect human health. **Turtles, iguanas, frogs, salamanders, and other reptiles or amphibians are not allowed to be kept as pets on the premises.** Animals shall not be allowed in or kept at the entrances to food preparation areas. Animal cages shall be kept clean and waste materials shall be bagged, sealed, and immediately disposed of in the exterior garbage area in a covered container. Animals belonging to child care owners, employees, volunteers, visitors, and children shall not be allowed in child care centers or on the premises unless the above requirements are met.

Childcare Center Pets	Allowed:	Veterinarian Report required:
Hamster, Gerbil, Ferrets, Guinea Pig, Bunnies, Rats, Mice, Cats, Dogs	YES	YES
Hermit or fiddler crabs	YES	NO
Cockroaches, Beetles or other insects	YES	NO
Fish	YES	NO
Earthworms, meal worms	YES	NO
Birds	YES	YES
Salamanders, Frogs or Aquatic frogs (amphibians)	NO	N/A
Lizards, Iguanas, Snakes, Turtles(reptiles)	NO	N/A

\* HANDS must be WASHED after handling any classroom pet.