



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

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Date: September 10, 2026
To: Local Health Departments and Petting Zoo Operators
From: Dr. Michael Martin, NC State Veterinarian, NCDA&CS
Dr. Carl Williams, NC State Public Health Veterinarian, NCDHHS
Subject: Zoonotic disease risk associated with animals in public contact

Introduction

The recent rabies [exposures](#) associated with goats from a petting zoo have raised questions and concerns about animal health in North Carolina. Petting zoos and animal exhibits can be an excellent way for people to learn about livestock and provide an enjoyable experience. However, there are some risks as animals can harbor germs that can harm people.

In NC, [Aedin's Law](#) was enacted in 2005 (following a large petting zoo associated outbreak of Shiga toxin producing E. coli O157:H7) to specifically address public health concerns for animals exhibited in agriculturally sanctioned fairs. For venues that are not covered by Aedin's Law, both the NCDHHS and NCDA&CS recommend adherence to the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians Compendium for [Animals in Public Settings](#).

Recommendations

We encourage all petting zoo operators to read the compendium and comply with the recommendations included in the document. All sheep, cattle and horses in public contact should be vaccinated against rabies, and there are USDA licensed vaccines for all three species.

While there is no licensed vaccine for goats, we strongly encourage all goats in public contact be vaccinated with a product licensed for use in sheep. A licensed veterinarian, in the context of a veterinarian-client-patient relationship can legally use a vaccine off label under their professional judgement.

Petting zoo animals that have had an exposure to rabies should not be exhibited.

Considerations

Veterinary rabies vaccines are highly immunogenic and are likely to generate immunity in a variety of [mammalian species](#). Rabies vaccinated animals are unlikely to become infected. However, since rabies vaccines would remain "off label" for goats, control measures may still be required in the event they are exposed.

Other mammalian species that are exhibited in petting zoos (such as camels, llamas and alpacas) could also be vaccinated for rabies at least one month prior being placed in public contact.

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