

Animal Visitor Policy

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1. Introductions and aims of policy

The RNOH is committed to ensuring that its services and facilities are open and accessible to all. It takes its responsibilities under the Equalities Act (2010) seriously, and recognises that unnecessary restrictions of access to guide and assistance dogs and other animals could prevent some service users from having appropriate access to the hospital.

Assistance dogs are used by people who have certain disabilities in order to retain a level of independence. These dogs have been thoroughly trained and assessed by specialist organisations to allow them to safely carry out their important role.

The RNOH is required under the Equality Act 2010 to ensure every effort is made to accommodate people's needs, as long as patient and staff safety is not put at unnecessary risk. The Trust allows service animals on its premises.

PAT (Pets-as-Therapy) dogs can provide valuable therapeutic assistance to patients, and provision for their access is also documented below.

There is also some scope for allowing patients' pet dogs and other suitable species of pet to be brought into hospital buildings.

This policy sets out the processes for allowing access to dogs to the hospital. In certain cases, other species of animal may be admitted. These instances are listed below.

2. Definitions

2.1 Infections

There are a number of zoonotic infections that animals can bring into hospital environments. Even apparently healthy animals can bring with them *Clostridium difficile*, *Giardia*, and *Salmonella* (by reptiles). Transmission to humans is via direct or indirect contact with faeces.

Other zoonotic infections are *ringworm*, *toxocaniasis*, and *toxoplasmosis* (from cat faeces).

Animal bites can also result in infections, including Tetanus and other bacterial infections.

Any animal known to be unwell or suffering from vomiting and / or diarrhoea should not be allowed in to the hospital.

2.2 Parasites

Parasitic worms can be transmitted from animals to humans through direct or indirect contact with faeces. These include *toxocaniasis*, and *toxoplasmosis*.

Fleas can also be transmitted to humans, although this is rare.

All visiting dogs should be regularly wormed and given preventative flea treatment.

2.3 Allergies

Animal allergens are a widespread cause of allergic reactions. These reactions can be caused by animal saliva, skin, and urine.

Any visiting animals should be kept well clear of patients and staff with known allergies to animals.

2.4 Phobias

Some people have a fear of a particular type of animal and will become extremely distressed should they be in close proximity to one.

Any visiting animal should be kept well clear of patients, staff, or volunteers with known phobias.

2.5 Dogs

The most common species of animal likely to be brought in to the hospital are dogs. Dogs are social creatures, evolved to be highly responsive to humans and thrive in human company. Extremely trainable, dogs perform a number of roles, including:

2.5.1 Guide dogs

These dogs are trained by The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association and provide assistance to individuals who are blind or partially sighted.

Qualified guide dogs wear a white harness with yellow fluorescent strips.

2.5.2 Hearing dogs

These dogs are trained by Hearing Dogs for Deaf People, and provide assistance to individuals who are deaf or have hearing difficulties.

Qualified hearing dogs wear a burgundy jacket.

2.5.3 Assistance dogs

These dogs are trained by Dogs for the Disabled, Canine Partners, Support Dogs, or Dog A.I.D. These dogs can provide assistance to disabled people, people with autism, or people with learning difficulties.

Qualified Dogs for the Disabled assistance dogs wear a fluorescent yellow jacket. Autism assistance dogs wear a blue harness. Qualified Canine Partners assistance dogs wear a purple jacket. Qualified Dog A.I.D. assistance dogs wear a red jacket.

2.5.4 Medical Detection and Seizure Alert dogs

These dogs are trained by Support Dogs or Medical Detection Dogs. These dogs can detect odour changes that are associated with severe medical conditions and alert their owners when a seizure or incident is about to happen.

Qualified dogs wear a red jacket

2.5.5 Pets-as-Therapy dogs

These dogs are trained and assessed by Pets as Therapy (PAT), and are temperamentally suitable for visiting patients to provide some therapeutic assistance.

2.5.6 Pet dogs

These dogs are owned by individuals and will have varying levels of training and a range of temperaments.

2.5.7 Security Animals

These are dogs that work for the police, and can include sniffer dogs and security dogs.

2.6 Cats

While there are some cats that have become qualified PAT cats, the nature and behaviour of the cat makes it an unsuitable visitor in any capacity.

Cats make great pets and can be highly affectionate and people-orientated. They are, however, territorial rather than social creatures, and do not cope well being taken to new environments. Their instinct when stressed is primarily to take flight. Bringing a cat into the hospital risks causing it stress and risking its escape, and possible harm to itself and others.

In the interests of their welfare, cats, whether PAT cats or pet cats, are not permitted into the hospital unless under exceptional circumstances. In such instances, the temperament of the cat and how it reacts to novel environments and travelling should be considered and should only be brought in a secure carrier. The cat should only be let out in a closed room with no possibility for escape should it panic.

2.7 Other Mammals

Generally speaking, most assistance animals will be dogs. While there are instances of other mammals, such as monkeys, goats, rats, miniature horses, and pigs being used to assist humans, these are significantly few in number to warrant specific attention. Should somebody request access for their assistance goat or monkey, the decision should be made between the ward manager and director of nursing.

Mammalian pets other than dogs, such as rodents, rabbits, and cats should not be brought onto the hospital site for any reason.

2.8 Non-mammals

The increased popularity of reptilian pets has led to more snakes, lizards, and other reptiles being owned. Some people keep arachnids as pets. Fish and amphibians are also popular pets.

Generally, no non-mammalian animals will be allowed into the hospital.

3. Duties and Responsibilities

3.1 Chief Executive

The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for ensuring the Trust has appropriate strategies, policies and procedures in place to ensure the Trust continues to work to best practice and complies with all legislation.

3.2 Director of Nursing

The director of nursing is the executive lead for infection control and is the owner of this policy.

3.3 Infection Control Team

The Infection Control team should provide any necessary advice on preventing the spread of infection through animal visits. The team has the responsibility to inform the RNOH of any changes to infection control legislation which may affect this policy.

3.4 Heads of Departments / Matrons / Lead Nurse / Ward Manager

It is the responsibility of departmental heads / managers to ensure that assistance dog users are made to feel welcome in their area and their access needs catered for. Should an assistance dog user be refused access to a ward or department, the Trust needs to do so on appropriate and reasonable grounds.

3.5 Volunteer Services Manager

All PAT visits should be arranged with the Volunteer Services Manager and be coordinated in advance with relevant ward and departmental managers.

Copies of training and assessment certification and relevant insurance for PAT dogs will be kept on record by the Volunteer Services Manager.

3.6 All staff and volunteers

All staff and volunteers should be aware of this policy and understand their duty to make assistance dog users feel welcomed to the Trust.

4. Body of Policy

4.1 Guidance for all animal visits

The majority of cases of animals visiting the Trust will be assistance dogs accompanying their owners.

Pets are generally not permitted to accompany or visit their owners to hospital unless they are trained service animals. All service animals should be identifiable by a specific coat or harness. Should it be unclear whether an animal is a service animal, staff should ask directly whether the animal is in service.

4.1.1 Health of the animal

Should the animal be visibly ill, e.g. suffering from diarrhoea or vomiting, it should not be permitted into the hospital.

4.1.2 Welfare of the animal

a. Dogs in cars

Dogs can die in hot cars, and patients and visitors should not keep their dog inside their car whilst they visit the hospital or use our services.

The RSPCA advises that:

When it's 22°C/72°F outside, the temperature inside a car can reach 47°C/117°F within 60 minutes.

Heatstroke can be fatal to dogs. Should a member of staff or volunteer see a dog left alone in a hot car, they should notify their manager who should call the Police immediately.

b. Age restrictions

It is not acceptable for a dog to visit the hospital if it is a puppy (under 6 months old), heavily pregnant, or has recently given birth (and is

therefore separated from its offspring). Service animals will not fall into these categories.

c. Food and water

Animals should be provided with clean drinking water. Owners should be encouraged to bring a drinking bowl with them. Portable travel bowls are useful. If no suitable bowl is available, one can be borrowed from the Volunteer Services Office.

Food should not normally be given to visiting animals unless the visit is for an extended period of time. Dogs should feed from a clean bowl provided by the owner and cleaned thoroughly afterwards.

Dog treats are permitted providing they are shop-bought and hygienic. Home-cooked treats, such as sausages and chicken are not permitted due to hygiene risks.

d. Stress and anxiety

Even well-trained dogs can suffer from stress and anxiety when put into an unfamiliar and strange environment. Should a dog be showing signs of stress and agitation, it should be removed from the environment and taken somewhere to calm down and relax. Appendix 1 lists some common signs of stress and anxiety in dogs.

4.2 Visits by Service Animals

These dogs provide support in a range of ways that help their owners access services and maintain independence.

Unless there is a clinical or health and safety reason why a dog cannot be admitted into an area, service dogs should be permitted to accompany their owners while at the Trust.

Service dogs will likely accompany patients and visitors for short periods of time (for an Outpatients appointment or to visit a relative).

There is no need for any formal prior arrangements to be made for the visit of a service dog. The Trust is committed to providing ease of access for all, and recognises the role service animals play in helping facilitate access to services for those in need of assistance.

Staff should welcome the patient or visitor, but not interact with a dog who is working.

4.3 PAT animals

4.3.1 PAT dogs belong to volunteers who have trained them sufficiently to be passed by Pets as Therapy. PAT dog visits will be arranged by Volunteer Services on behalf of or in conjunction with a relevant ward or department.

PAT dogs should remain with their owners whilst on site and remain on lead at all times. These dogs can be stroked and interacted with, but should a member of staff feel the dog or patients are stressed, the visit should be ended appropriately.

4.4 Patients' pets

The RNOH has a number of long –term inpatients. Some of these may have pet dogs that they would enjoy seeing. In this situation, should clinical staff deem it appropriate, a patient's pet dog can be brought on to site to visit the patient. The location should be outside, at the discretion of staff.

Should staff feel the dog is a risk due to its behaviour towards others the visit should be ended appropriately. The dog must remain on lead at all times. Any toileting should be done outside and faeces disposed of in bins. The patient's family or friends should ensure that water is provided for the dog during its visit and the dog should not be left alone in the car.

4.5 Infection control and Health and safety risk

4.5.1 Restricted areas

Animals will not be permitted in the following areas:

- Anaesthetic or theatre rooms
- Any clinical procedure rooms
- High dependency and intensive care units
- Children's wards, without prior consent of consultant paediatrician and Matron
- Any area used for cooking or food preparation or eating
- No other area that is kept sterile by default

4.5.2 Cleaning

- a. **Hand Hygiene** is expected by patients, staff, and visitors following contact with the animal. Hand washing with soap and water must take place following handling of the animal.

- b. **Animal waste**
If the animal urinates or defecates in an area, cleaning should be performed with appropriate PPE. Waste should be deposited in a plastic bag and disposed of in clinical waste. Disposable gloves and a plastic apron should be worn.

Following removal of the urine or faeces, the area should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.

5. Monitoring and the effectiveness of this policy

5.1 Monitoring

Any incident or event involving a visiting animal should be recorded, reported, and investigated appropriately.

Appendix 1: Animal Welfare Considerations

Animal Welfare

It is unlikely that the hospital will be visited by animals other than dogs. Dogs are social and trainable animals that can perform a number of roles. The following is a guide produced by the RSPCA about dog body language. Should a dog appear worried or stressed, the visit should be ended and the dog be taken somewhere to calm down and relax. No staff should approach a dog that looks angry or highly

agitated.



Understanding dog behaviour

YOUR DOG'S BODY LANGUAGE CAN HELP YOU TO UNDERSTAND HOW THEY ARE FEELING

A happy dog

A dog who is happy will be relaxed.

1

Dog has a relaxed body posture, smooth hair, mouth open and relaxed, ears in natural position, wagging tail, eyes normal shape.



2

Dog is inviting play with bottom raised, smooth hair, high wagging tail, eyes normal shape, ears in natural position, may be barking excitedly.



3

Dog's weight is distributed across all four paws, smooth hair, tail wagging, face is interested and alert, relaxed and mouth open.

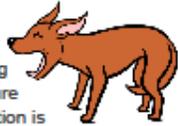


A worried dog

These dogs are telling you that they are uncomfortable and don't want you to go near them.

1

Dog is standing but body posture and head position is low. Tail is tucked under, ears are back and dog is yawning.



2

Dog is lying down and avoiding eye contact or turning head away from you and lip licking and ears are back.



3

Dog is sitting with head lowered, ears are back, tail tucked away, not making eye contact, yawning, raising a front paw.



An angry or very unhappy dog

These dogs are not happy and want you to stay away or go away.

1

Dog is standing with a stiffened body posture, weight forward, ears are up, hair raised, eyes looking at you – pupils dark and enlarged, tail is up and stiff, wrinkled nose.



2

Dog is lying down cowering, ears flat, teeth showing, tail down between legs.



3

Dog is standing with body down and weight towards the back, head is tilted upwards, mouth tight, lips drawn back, teeth exposed, eyes staring, ears back and down, snarling.



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This policy is available on request in large print and alternative languages. It is a manager's responsibility to ensure employees are aware of these options.

* The following policies must be sent for review to the Local Counter Fraud Specialist:

- Fraud and Bribery
- Standard Financial Instructions
- Declaration of Interests
- Gifts and Hospitality
- Whistleblowing
- Disciplinary
- IT
- Anti-Money Laundering
- Managing Sickness Absence
- Secondary Employment
- Expenses
- Overpayment
- Financial Redress
- TOIL (Time off in Lieu)
- Code of Conduct/Standards of Business Conduct
- Data Protection
- Lone Worker
- Patient Transport
- Commercial Sponsorship
- Overseas Visitors
- Disclosure