1.0 PURPOSE:

1.1 To provide guidelines for pet therapy and pet visitation to patients in Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) hospitals.
1.2 To prevent transmission of animal-related infectious agents within WRHA acute care facilities.

2.0 PREAMBLE:

2.1 The benefits of pet visitation and animal therapy are well documented. However, prior to allowing any animals to enter acute care facilities, infection prevention and control concerns must be addressed.
2.2 Animals can transmit infectious agents to humans and the animals can acquire disease or become carriers of organisms as a result of contact with humans. Dogs have been shown to be carriers of Salmonella, methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) and Clostridium difficile. Cats are known to transmit MRSA and toxoplasmosis.
2.3 Species identified as higher risk to cause human infection or injury shall not enter the acute care facility. These include but are not limited to: reptiles and amphibians (e.g., snakes, iguanas, lizards, turtles, frogs, salamanders), rodents (hamsters, gerbils, mice, rats), ferrets, raccoons, skunks, bats, nonhuman primates, hedgehogs, prairie dogs or other recently domesticated animal species.
2.4 This document will provide a framework for safe animal visits/therapy in acute care facilities for patients, visitors, healthcare workers and the animals.
2.5 This document does not specifically address service animals. Every reasonable effort shall be made to accommodate service animals. For information on service animals see: http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/svcanimb.htm

3.0 DEFINITIONS:

3.1 Animal Assisted Interventions (AAIs): The use of trained, well groomed, medically screened, appropriately vaccinated animals by handlers to achieve specific physical, social, cognitive, and emotional goals with patients/residents; also called pet therapy.

3.2 Animal Visit Liaison (AVL): A staff person(s) designated to act as a resource regarding animals in the facility and provide support to animal handlers visiting the facility.

3.3 Facility Approved Disinfectant: A disinfectant cleaner that has been approved by the facility or organization.

3.4 Hand Hygiene: A general term that applies to hand washing, antiseptic hand wash, antiseptic hand rub or surgical hand antisepsis. Refer to Routine Practices Policy # 90.00.060

3.5 AAI Handler: An individual who has been approved to participate in animal assisted interventions.

3.6 Personal Pet: A family owned pet that, with prior approval, is brought into the facility for the sole purpose of visiting a specific patient.

3.7 Pet Escort: A responsible individual, other than a patient, who has been designated to accompany and control a personal pet during a visit to an acute care facility.

3.8 Service Animal: Animals individually trained to perform tasks for people with disabilities such as guiding people who are blind, alerting people who are deaf, pulling wheelchairs, alerting and protecting a person who is having a seizure, or performing other special tasks. Service animals are working animals, not pets.

4.0 OPERATIONAL DIRECTIVES:

4.1 Site Requirements

4.1.1 Each site should provide:

- A sign-in system for Animal Assisted Intervention Handlers
- Information sheets for pet escorts

4.2 Basic requirements for all animals
4.2.1 Animals shall:

- Have all vaccinations, including rabies, up to date.
- Receive a health evaluation by a veterinarian at least once per year.
- Be well groomed (nails trimmed, not malodorous, free of any fleas or ticks).

4.2.2 Animals shall not:

- Have eaten any raw/dehydrated meat/chews within the past 90 days.
- Enter the following areas:
  - Food preparation/consumption areas
  - Medication preparation areas
  - Operating rooms
  - Neonatal nurseries, post partum and labour and delivery
  - Medical treatment/procedure areas, Clean supply rooms
  - Dialysis or Burn Units (special exceptions may be made in consultation with the patient’s physician as well as Infection Prevention and Control)
  - Isolation Rooms (Special exceptions may be made in consultation with Infection Prevention and Control)
  - Other areas as designated by site Infection Prevention and Control
- Visit the hospital at the onset and until at least one week following resolution of:
  - Episodes of diarrhea or vomiting
  - Urinary or fecal incontinence
  - Episodes of sneezing/coughing potentially related to an infectious agent
  - Treatment with non-topical antimicrobials or any immunosuppressive medications
  - Open wounds
  - Ear infections
  - Skin Infections or “hot spots” (moist dermatitis)
  - Conditions which might cause distress/pain to the animal during the visit
  - Be in or upcoming to a heat cycle (estrus)
- Live in Acute Care Facilities.
  - Only personal pets, animal assisted interventions and service animals are permitted in hospitals.
  - All other animals shall be denied entry to acute care facilities.

4.3 Guidelines for all animals while in the facility

4.3.1 Animals shall be leashed or transported in a clean cage and under the control of a Pet Escort/AAI Handler at all times while in the facility.

4.3.2 Individuals injured by an animal shall be evaluated and treated promptly by medical personnel, as appropriate for the type of injury.
4.3.2.1 • Injuries caused by an animal shall be reported and documented appropriately.
• Animals having caused intentional or serious injury shall be permanently banned from the facility. Minor, unintentional injuries may be considered on a case-by-case basis.
• Animal bites may be reported to Health Links/Info Santé for possible follow-up and investigation by Public Health.

4.4 Pet Escort/AAI Handler Responsibilities in the Facility
4.4.1 The Pet Escort shall obtain permission from the site unit manager/designated facility contact prior to visitation.
4.4.2 AAI Handlers shall sign in upon entering the facility.
4.4.3 Before entering a room or elevator with an animal, the Pet Escort/AAI Handler must obtain verbal permission from the occupants.
4.4.4 The Pet Escort/AAI Handler shall dispose of any animal waste. Pick up waste with paper towel and place in plastic bag, tie shut and put in soiled room garbage, not in patient garbage. Perform hand hygiene and inform staff who shall clean and disinfect the area.
4.4.5 The Pet Escort/AAI Handler shall report injuries caused by their animal to the unit manager/designate, the animal owner and the AVL.

4.5 Hand Hygiene Requirements
4.5.1 All patients, visitors, and health care workers must perform hand hygiene before and after animal contact.
4.5.2 AAI Handlers should carry alcohol based hand rub and advise anyone who has contact with the animal to perform hand hygiene before and after animal contact.
4.5.3 Pet Escorts/AAI Handlers must be informed of their responsibilities regarding hand hygiene when they bring the animal into the facility.

4.6 Personal Pet Visit
4.6.1 A visit by a personal pet is allowed only with prior approval.
4.6.2 The decision to permit a personal pet into the facility will be made on a case-by-case basis, including the timing and location of the visit.
4.6.3 The patient’s physician shall be consulted if necessary for evaluation of the patient’s allergy status and immune system competency.
4.6.4 In general, personal pets shall be restricted from visiting a patient in a critical care or isolation room except under special circumstances (e.g., a palliative patient). Consultation with Infection Prevention and Control should occur in these cases.
4.6.5 Personal pets are not allowed to visit patients, visitors or staff other than the patient they have been approved to visit.
4.6.6 Facilities should have written information sheets to provide to pet escorts who are bringing in a personal pet to visit a specific patient. (See Appendix A.) These sheets should include information regarding hand hygiene, pet health and visit restrictions. The information sheet should also include instruction to the Pet Escort of the need to discourage interaction with the pet by staff and patients other than the specific patient for whom the visit has been pre-approved.

4.7 Animal Assisted Interventions

Facilities shall have written policies to govern the AAI programs in their facility. These policies shall

4.7.1 Designate who has the overall responsibility for the program within the facility.

4.7.2 Ensure AAI Handlers are registered with the program, have appropriate training, are orientated to the health care facility and wear the appropriate identification while in the facility.

4.7.3 Ensure the animals meet and adhere to required health screening for AAI animals and facility standards for patient safety and health.

5.0 REFERENCES:


5.6 Winnipeg Regional Health Authority Personal Care Home Infection Prevention & Control. Pets & Pet Therapy in Personal Care Homes and Long Term Care Facilities. June 2010.

**Operational Directive Contacts:**
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APPENDIX A

Personal Pet Escort Information Sheet
for Hospitals

This sheet provides information for persons who wish to bring a patient's personal pet to visit in a hospital. This information will help to ensure a safe and positive experience for the patient, the pet and others. Persons who bring a pet into a hospital must know and follow the facility rules and must be responsible for the pet at all times.

Before a pet may be brought into a hospital, permission must be obtained from the person in charge of the unit where the visit will take place. Not all animals are appropriate to bring into a hospital. Animals known to frequently carry disease or have unpredictable temperaments are not allowed to visit. Some patients, because of their medical condition or the hospital unit which they are on, should not have a pet visit.

A pet that is allowed to visit must be:
- Friendly, obedient, predictable and quiet.
- Up-to-date with all vaccinations, including rabies.
- Well groomed i.e., trimmed nails, no ticks or fleas, and have no bad odors.
- Healthy when visiting i.e., no diarrhea, vomiting, respiratory problems, open sores, injured limbs and not in heat.

Pets are not allowed to enter:
- Dining Rooms/ Cafeterias/ Food preparation areas
- Emergency Departments
- Isolation Rooms
- Medication preparation areas / Clean supply rooms
- Nurseries, Post Partum and Labour & Delivery areas
- Operating Rooms
- Specialized patient care units (Burn, Dialysis, Intensive Care, Oncology)
- Any other spaces designated as off limits by the hospital
Instructions regarding pets in the hospital:

- The pet must be on a leash and under control at all times during the visit, or transported in a clean cage.
- The pet escort must bring a plastic bag and paper towel to clean up after any pet accidents.
- The pet may only visit the patient(s) that it has been approved to visit and interaction with staff and other patients should be discouraged.
- If anyone is allergic to or afraid of your pet, you must accommodate them by removing the animal from the room. If this is expressed while boarding an elevator you and the pet must exit the elevator and take the next available one.
- The pet escort must clean their hands when entering the hospital, patient's room, leaving the patient's room, and when leaving the hospital.
- The patient visited by the pet must clean their hands before and after handling the pet.

If the pet has an accident:

- Pick up waste with paper towel and place in plastic bag, tie shut and put in the garbage in the soiled supply room not in patient garbage.
- Clean your hands.
- Notify a healthcare worker to disinfect area.

If a patient, visitor or staff is bitten or scratched or injured in any other way by the animal:

- It must be reported to the person in charge of the unit where the accident occurred.
- The injury should be evaluated and treated promptly.

The pet escort must abide by the rules of the facility and can be asked to remove the pet from the facility if the rules are not followed or the pet displays other undesirable behaviors.