

## Document Control

<b>Title</b>			
<b>Animals and Pets in Hospital Policy</b>			
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<b>Version</b>	<b>Date Issued</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Comment / Changes / Approval</b>
0.1	Nov 2012	Draft	Initial version for consultation
1.0	Feb 2013	Final	Approved at IPCC 5 <sup>th</sup> February 2013 with amendment required by IPCC made.
1.1	May 2013	Revision	Minor amendments to formatting for document map navigation and semi-automatic table of contents. Prompts to author in red text.
1.2	Feb 2016	Revision	New Template. Minor amendments
1.3	August 2019	Revision	Eastern contact details removed. Addition of information regarding assistance dogs Minor updates
2.0	August 2019	Final	Approved at IPDG meeting 27.08.19
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<b>Superseded Documents</b>			
NHS Devon / Devon Provider Services Guidance on Animals and Pets in Healthcare Facilities policy			
<b>Issue Date</b>		<b>Review Date</b>	<b>Review Cycle</b>
August 2019		August 2022	Three years
<b>Consulted with the following stakeholders:</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Infection Prevention &amp; Decontamination Group</li> </ul>			
<b>Approval and Review Process</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Infection Prevention &amp; Decontamination Group</li> </ul>			
<b>Local Archive Reference</b>			
G:\Infection Control			
<b>Local Path</b>			
Infection Control\IC Manual-Policies\New Templates from 2015\Animals and Pets in Hospital Policy			

**Filename**

Animals and Pets in Hospital Policy v2 Aug 2019 final

**Policy categories for Trust's internal website (Bob)**

Infection Control

**Tags for Trust's internal website (Bob)**

Guide Dogs

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## CONTENTS

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<b>Document Control .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Purpose .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Definitions .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Responsibilities .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3.1 Role of the Chief Nurse .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3.2 Ward/ Departmental Managers .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3.3 Infection Prevention and Control Team .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3.4 The Infection Prevention and Decontamination Group .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4. Contacting the Infection Prevention and Control Team .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5. Animals and Pets in Hospital.....</b>	<b>5</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	5
5.2 Pets as Therapy Animals .....	6
5.3 Assistance/Service Dogs .....	7
5.4 Patient pet visitations in exceptional circumstances .....	7
5.5 Aquariums in Reception/Waiting Areas.....	8
5.6 Other Animals .....	8
<b>6. Monitoring Compliance with and the Effectiveness of the Policy .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Standards/ Key Performance Indicators .....	8
Process for Implementation and Monitoring Compliance and Effectiveness .....	9
<b>7. Equality Impact Assessment .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>8. References .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>9. Associated Documentation.....</b>	<b>10</b>

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this document is to detail Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust's guidance policy on animals and pets in hospitals. It provides a robust framework to ensure a consistent approach across the whole organisation, and supports our statutory duties as set out in the NHS Constitution
- 1.2 The purpose of this document is to inform and guide staff on the control of animals and pets in hospital and applies to all healthcare staff.
- 1.3 Implementation of this policy will ensure that all staff are aware of the Trust policy regarding animals and pets on Trust premises.
- 1.4 The policy applies to all staff

## 2. Definitions

### 2.1 Animals and pets

The definition of animals and pets include all mammals, reptiles, insects, fish and birds.

## 3. Responsibilities

### 3.1 Role of the Chief Nurse

The Chief Nurse is responsible for:

- Acting as a second point of contact to support
- Ensuring that a replacement main contact is identified should the original author be re-deployed or leave the organisation

### 3.2 Ward/ Departmental Managers

Responsibility for implementation of this policy lies with the Senior Nurse (usually Ward Sister) or Departmental Manager in Charge of the areas to which these statements apply unless specifically stated otherwise in the text.

### 3.3 Infection Prevention and Control Team

It is the responsibility of the Infection Prevention & Control Team to support managers in the implementation of this policy. The Infection Prevention & Control Team undertake to provide education and clarification to support the utilisation of this policy prior to and following implementation when requested to do so by the Department Manager

(usually Ward or Departmental Manager in charge of the areas to which these statements apply unless specifically stated otherwise in the text).

### 3.4 The Infection Prevention and Decontamination Group

Monitoring compliance with the policy

Ensuring that the policy is approved after review and prior to publishing

## 4. Contacting the Infection Prevention and Control Team

4.1 The Infection Prevention and Control Team can be contacted in hours on 01271 322680 (ext. 2680 internal at North Devon District Hospital), via bleep 011 or out of hours by contacting the on-call Medical Microbiologist via North Devon District Hospital switchboard.

## 5. Animals and Pets in Hospital

### 5.1 Introduction

Pet animals enhance the quality of life for many people. However animals can carry infections which can occasionally be transmitted to humans, particularly people who are immuno-suppressed or who have other health problems.

As a general rule, to minimise the risk to patients in hospital, no pet mammals, reptiles, insects or birds are allowed on Trust premises. However there are some exceptions to this rule, eg:

- Assistance/service dogs
- Pets as therapy animals
- Personal pet visitations in special circumstances
- Aquariums in Reception/Waiting Areas

The benefit or necessity associated with the presence of the animals/pets given in the examples above, means that there must be careful risk assessment and planning to ensure any risks including infection are kept to a minimum eg some animals may be difficult to control and could pose risk to patients, visitors and staff due to their behaviour.

Consideration must be given to the following aspects:

- Welfare of the animals/pets being brought into hospital
- Suitability of the animal i.e. behaviour/training
- General health and condition of the animal
- Hygiene practices during the visit i.e. patient, visitor and staff hand hygiene, and arrangements should animal urinate or defecate in hospital
- Patient, visitor and staff perceptions of an animal in hospital

- Patient, visitor and staff fears/phobias of animals
- Patient, visitor and staff allergies to animals

## 5.2 Pets as Therapy Animals

All cats and dogs used by the Pets as Therapy (PAT) organisation will have a record detailing their vaccinations, visits to the vet and state of health. This helps to minimise the risk of the animal harbouring an infection which could be transmitted to patients. A copy of the animal's health record should be available on request. PAT animals are temperament assessed, must be over 9 months old, fully wormed and covered by the PAT insurance scheme. Any PAT animal visiting a clinical area should be accompanied at all times by its registered owner.

All visits should be pre-arranged. The nurse in charge of the clinical area will determine whether the PAT animal will be allowed into the area and whether any conditions or restrictions are necessary.

When a PAT dog or cat visits the hospital premises the following procedures must be adhered to:

- Staff and patients must wash their hands before and after handling the dog or cat.
- The dog or cat must be properly supervised by its owner or by a staff member at all times.
- Staff must identify whether there are immuno-suppressed or otherwise vulnerable patients who may be put at risk from contact with the dog or cat. If such a risk is identified the animal must be kept away from the patients at risk or even excluded from the clinical area.
- Any visiting animals should be kept well away from any patients and/or staff with known allergies to animals
- The animal should be kept on a lead or otherwise suitably restrained and must not be allowed to wander freely around clinical areas or elsewhere on Trust premises.
- If staff or patients who may come into contact with the animal have any wounds, sores or broken areas of skin, these must be kept covered at all times.
- No dog or cat food can be kept on the hospital premises.
- If the animal shows any signs of illness the ward staff must request that the animal is seen by a vet. The animal will require authorisation from the vet before it will be allowed to return to hospital premises.
- The Infection Prevention & Control Team may exclude the animal from clinical areas and/or from the hospital premises if it is

suspected to be a source or vector of infection. The registered owner may be requested to have the animal examined by a vet before being allowed back into the hospital to ensure it is not a risk to patients.

- If the animal urinates or defecates in the hospital, the contamination must be cleaned up immediately in accordance with the [Decontamination Policy](#).
- Healthcare staff should inform the domestic services manager if extra cleaning may be required, for example the removal of dog or cat hairs from carpets and furnishings.
- When PAT cats and dogs are allowed on hospital premises, the animal's owner and healthcare workers must ensure that the animal is not a nuisance to other patients and that it does not interfere with patient care. If any patients object to the animal's presence then arrangements must be made to ensure that the animal is kept away from them. If necessary the animal may need exclusion from specific clinical areas.

Animals owned by members of staff that are not registered as part of a PAT scheme must not be brought into a work setting.

### 5.3 Assistance/Service Dogs

There are many kinds of assistance/service dogs eg guide dogs, police dogs, hearing dogs, medical detection and seizure alert dogs. The most frequently seen assistance dogs in hospital settings are guide dogs assisting patients, visitors or staff. In general there are no specific arrangements needed for assistance dogs attending hospitals with patients for appointments etc other than the usual hand hygiene practices advised by the IP&C team.

If an assistance dog needs to be present in clinical areas for prolonged periods of time eg staff member with an assistance dog then further planning and risk assessment is required as mentioned in section 5.1. This planning and risk assessment should involve the individual requiring the assistance dog, the manager of the clinical area, Health and Safety Manager and infection prevention and control team.

### 5.4 Patient pet visitations in exceptional circumstances

In some exceptional circumstances it may be possible to arrange for a patient to receive a visit from a special pet or unusual animal. This must be arranged in consultation with the patient, patient's family/visitor, nurse in charge and IP & C team taking into consideration the points raised in section 5.1.

Although the benefits for the patient of seeing their pet may be apparent, careful consideration of how the animal will react or behave is important. It may be distressing for an animal to be brought into the

hospital environment if it has not been there before – for example assistance and pets as therapy animals ( PAT) have received special training and are matched for temperament/suitability. Assistance and PAT animals are managed to ensure they are free from fleas, worms etc and are up to date with vaccinations – this may not be the case for some pets. Where possible it is preferable if the visit could be arranged away from the ward environment, for example outside the main entrance, in a day room or quiet space in the hospital. If this is not possible moving the patient to a side room would facilitate the visit.

### **5.5 Aquariums in Reception/Waiting Areas**

Fish may be kept in reception areas/waiting areas, however, infection risks are posed by aquarium water, and therefore either a maintenance contract with an aquarium maintenance specialist must be established, via the Procurement department, or a Risk Assessment and Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) be in place identifying key issues around maintenance. This must be written on Trust SOP documentation, published on BOB and kept up to date by the responsible manager.

The fish tank must be cleaned and maintained as identified in the SOP. Hands must be washed after any activities involving the aquarium.

Any requests for new installations of aquariums must be raised with the Infection Prevention and Control Team before proceeding.

### **5.6 Other Animals**

Any wild animals, e.g. hedgehogs, squirrels, rabbits, farm animals, feral cats, ducks and other wild birds, must not be encouraged into in-patient settings by feeding.

Although it may seem beneficial to attract some of these animals for patients, visitors or staff to watch, unfortunately feeding any of the above will also attract pests and vermin onto the premises eg ants, beetles, wasps, flies, rats and mice.

## **6. Monitoring Compliance with and the Effectiveness of the Policy**

### **Standards/ Key Performance Indicators**

#### **6.1 Key performance indicators comprise:**

- Absence of incident forms relating to animals and pets in hospital.

## Process for Implementation and Monitoring Compliance and Effectiveness

- 6.2 After final approval, the author will arrange for a copy of the policy to be placed on the Trust's intranet. The policy will be referenced on the home page as a latest news release.

Information will also be included in the Chief Executive's Bulletin which is circulated electronically to all staff.

Line managers are responsible for ensuring this policy is implemented across their area of work.

Monitoring compliance with this policy will be the responsibility of the Infection Prevention and Control team. This will be undertaken by Weekly monitoring of incident forms at the Infection Prevention and Control team meetings

Where non-compliance is identified, support and advice will be provided to improve practice.

## 7. Equality Impact Assessment

Table 1: Equality impact Assessment

Group	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	No Impact	Comment
Age			X	
Disability			X	
Gender			X	
Gender Reassignment			X	
Human Rights (rights to privacy, dignity, liberty and non-degrading treatment), marriage and civil partnership			X	
Pregnancy			X	
Maternity and Breastfeeding			X	
Race (ethnic origin)			X	
Religion (or belief)			X	
Sexual Orientation			X	

## 8. References

- Khan M.A. and Farrag N. (2000) Animal-assisted activity and infection control implications in a healthcare setting. *Journal of Hospital Infection* 46: 4-11
- Watkins M, Wyatt T (1989) A ticklish problem: pest infestation in hospitals. *Prof. Nurse* May: 369-392
- <http://petsastherapy.org/>
- Murthy R et al (May 2015) Animals in Healthcare Facilities: Recommendations to Minimize Potential Risks. *Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology* Vol. 36, No. 5
- Working with dogs in healthcare RCN May 2018
- Access to medical facilities for guide dog owners *Guide Dogs* March 2015

## 9. Associated Documentation

- [Decontamination policy](#)