### Workplace Hazards in Working with Animals

This fact sheet is for students undertaking work experience programs, and for their host employers. It can be used as a tool to assist with task planning, and to develop appropriate induction, training and supervision to minimise any risk to students while they are ‘at work’.

**Students must be given an induction addressing health and safety issues, and must be supervised at all times. Hazards must be considered when allocating tasks. If a risk cannot be managed, students must NOT undertake the activity.**

The hazards described here are commonly encountered in workplaces where animals are housed and/or treated: these include veterinary practices, wildlife sanctuaries and parks, zoos, animal shelters, stables, boarding facilities, pet shops.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hazard</th>
<th>Possible Harmful Effects</th>
<th>Possible Employer Action to Prevent Injury / Illness</th>
<th>Preventative Action Students Can Take</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Animals | Bites, mauling, scratches (smaller animals) and impact injuries such as fractures, crushing, bruising (larger animals) | ▪ Allow only experienced and trained staff to handle or restrain animals  
▪ Instruct staff in safe animal handling  
▪ Label cages where an animal’s behaviour gives reason for concern  
▪ Provide protective clothing | ▪ Students must NOT handle animals unless the animal and the task have been assessed by their supervisor  
▪ Don’t approach any animal unless assured by your supervisor that it’s safe |
| Autoclaves / sterilisers | Burns, scalding from steam | ▪ Ensure that only trained and experienced staff operate autoclaves  
▪ Ensure regular plant maintenance | ▪ Students must NOT be exposed to any dangerous plant or equipment |
| Animal enclosures, stalls and cages | Cuts from metal edges, manual handling injury, risk of infection or disease | ▪ Regular cleaning and maintenance  
▪ Design cages to minimise risk  
▪ Provide wash-up facilities | ▪ Don’t open enclosures, stalls or cages  
▪ Wear gloves when cleaning |
| Hazardous substances (drugs used in treatment, anaesthetics, cleaning chemicals) | Cytotoxic (cancer treating) and other drugs can cause illness. Short-term effects can include nausea, headaches | ▪ Follow strict handling, labelling and storage procedures for all hazardous substances  
▪ Provide protective clothing (such as gloves) for staff | ▪ Students must not medicate animals or handle any drugs used in animal treatment  
▪ Wear rubber gloves when using cleaning chemicals |
| Hazardous waste (soiled towels, swabs, syringes etc.) | Infectious diseases, cuts or ‘needle stick’ injuries; irritation to skin, eyes, nose or throat | ▪ Treat all waste as hazardous  
▪ Arrange for safe disposal into labelled containers  
▪ Provide gloves where needed | ▪ Wear rubber gloves when handling soiled material  
▪ Don’t handle syringes  
▪ Adopt good hygiene practices |
| Housekeeping | Slips, trips and falls as a result of slippery surfaces or things left on the floor or on the ground | ▪ Ensure that spills are cleaned immediately  
▪ Keep work areas clear of items that could present impact hazards | ▪ Follow procedures for cleaning up spills  
▪ Report any spills or obstacles |
| Manual handling | Musculoskeletal injuries (sprains and strains) | ▪ Assess every manual handling task  
▪ Use mechanical aids or team lifts  
▪ Train workers in manual handling | ▪ Don’t attempt any task if you think it may be difficult to do safely – ask for help! |
| X-rays (radiation) | Significant health risks, including cancers | ▪ Minimise potential for exposure to X-rays during radiography | ▪ Students must NOT be exposed to radiography processes |
| Zoonoses (diseases caught from animals) | Diseases including hydatid disease, ringworm, Q fever | ▪ Minimise potential for zoonotic infections – training, safe work practices, vaccination | ▪ Always wash up after contact with animals  
▪ Students must NOT enter any workplace where Q fever has been reported |
| Cuts | Infection | ▪ Ensure tasks with potential risk of cuts are assessed  
▪ Provide protective gloves  
▪ Provide washing facilities | ▪ Wear protective gloves  
▪ Wash hands immediately  
▪ Seek first aid immediately if needed |
| Allergies to animals or insects (or to animal feeds such as grasses) | Allergic reactions: respiratory illness, skin reactions | ▪ Document any known allergies among staff members  
▪ Prevent or minimise exposures | ▪ Follow safe working procedures  
▪ Report any suspected allergic reaction to supervisor without delay |
| Sexual harassment, workplace bullying | Emotional stress, fear and anxiety, physical illness | ▪ Establish work place policy  
▪ Provide staff briefings or training | ▪ Report any concerns immediately |