

MANAGEMENT OF RESIDENT/VISITING ANIMALS IN HEALTH CARE SETTINGS POLICY

Policy information

Policy number: 227

Classification: Clinical

Supersedes: 5

Version number: previous versions

Date of Equality Impact Assessment

Approval information

Approved by Clinical Written Control Documentation Group

Date of approval 7.11.2025

Date made active 10.11.2025

Review date 10.11.2028

Summary of document:

Guidance for all healthcare staff in the management of animals attending healthcare facilities

Scope:

This Policy applies to all staff working within the Hywel Dda University Health Board (H DUHB)

To be read in conjunction with:

[149 - Hand Hygiene Policy](#) – opens in a new tab

[354 – Standard Infection Prevention and Control Precautions \(SICP's\) Policy](#) – opens in a new tab

[107 - Volunteers Policy](#) – opens in a new tab

Patient information:

Owning group:

Infection Prevention Strategic Steering Group 13.6.2025

Executive Director job title:

Executive Director of Nursing, Quality & Patient Experience

Reviews and updates:

Version 1- Sept 2011

Version 2 – revised and updated 15.2.2017

Version 3 – amendment to section 8 – 17.1.2019

Version 4 – inclusion of appendix 2 social distancing guide dogs 31.3.2021

Version 5 – full review 7.11.2025

Keywords

Resident visiting animals in healthcare settings, assistance dogs, guide dogs

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Glossary of terms
PATS Pets as therapy

Keypoints:

Guidance for all healthcare staff in the management of animals attending healthcare facilities

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/KEY POINTS

- The only animals generally permitted within the health care setting are pet therapy dogs and cats, guide and hearing dogs and this is generally within long term care facilities.
- Other animals eg. hamsters are only permitted to be resident in some locations within the Hywel Dda University Health Board (HDUHB) i.e. long-term facilities including day hospitals, out-patient departments, rehabilitation wards, mental health and learning disabilities community bungalows.
- Animals can carry infections which can occasionally be transmitted to humans, particularly patients who are immunosuppressed or who have other health problems.
- Ultimately, the presence of any animal in the Ward/Unit area is responsibility of the Departmental Manager/Senior Ward Sister and must be risk assessed.
- Animals should not be allowed to visit or be resident with a patient who is severely immunocompromised, with large wounds or infected skin conditions except in exceptional circumstances and only after liaison with the Infection Prevention Team and the patient's consultant.
- It is the owner's responsibility and health care workers to ensure that the animal is not a nuisance to other patients and it does not interfere with patient care. If any patient objects to the animal's presence then arrangements must be made to ensure that the animal is kept away from them. The Infection Prevention Team must be informed of any animal visit before it takes place.

INTRODUCTION

Pet animals can enhance the quality of life for many people, however they can carry infections which can be zoonotic in nature meaning they can transfer to humans from animals. This is of particular concern for those that are vulnerable to infection or may be prone to allergic reaction.

Domestic pets should be considered for visiting patients at the end of life patients only.

Assistance dogs should be permitted in accordance with the Equality Act (2010) and should be identified as such.

The use of Pets as Therapy (PAT) animals and companion programmes have now become more popular in healthcare settings and the presence of animals in these settings must be carefully monitored to minimise risk to staff and patients and can only be justified when proven to be beneficial to the patient and family. Ultimately, the presence of any animal in the Ward/Unit area is responsibility of the Departmental Manager/Senior Ward Sister.

POLICY STATEMENT

The purpose of this policy is to assist in the management of animals visiting any healthcare premises.

SCOPE

This Policy applies to all staff working within the Hywel Dda University Health Board. The purpose of this policy is to protect the patient environment from the risk of infection from animals

AIM

This Policy sets out a framework to provide guidance for staff on how to manage animals visiting a healthcare facility. Refer to the HDUHB 107 - [Volunteers Policy \(opens in a new tab\)](#).

OBJECTIVES

The guidelines will raise staff awareness of relevant legislation and operational measures in relation to the presence of assistance dogs on HDUHB premises. They are intended to ensure assistance dogs are treated appropriately and to facilitate the elimination of discrimination and harassment of disabled people in healthcare settings in accordance with the Equality Act (2010).

VISITING PETS BROUGHT IN BY THERAPY HANDLERS

Visiting pets brought into the hospital ward include assistance dogs and pet therapy dogs. The above rules apply.

In addition:

- Pet therapy dogs should be sourced through a registered provider
- A risk assessment must be completed by the ward manager or senior nurse.
- Both handler and pet must have passed basic handler and obedience training
- Pets should not be left unattended.
- The visit must be arranged with ward manager and report to them on arrival and departure.
- The animal must be kept out of the hospital kitchen, all food preparation areas and dining areas.

The following basic advice must be given to handlers: -

- Visiting will not be permitted in the following circumstances- isolated patients, immune-compromised patients or if a patient poses a significant risk to the visiting animal.
- The pet should only be introduced to patients who request a visit and do not have specific allergies to animals.
- The pet and handler should be supported by a member of staff from the ward during the visit. This member of staff should promote hand washing or hand hygiene for staff and patients, this can also be achieved using designated hand wipes.
- If any animal bites a patient or a member of staff, the animal must be removed from the area immediately and may not return to hospital grounds. The person receiving the bite must attend the Accident & Emergency Department for treatment. All bite incidents must also be reported via Datix.

ASSISTANCE DOGS

An assistance dog must be specially trained to aid or assist a person with specific needs.

- Guide Dogs
- Hearing Dogs for Deaf People
- Medical Detection Dogs
- Support Dogs

Guide/Hearing Dogs

An unexpected attendance to hospital due to illness by the owner of a guide/hearing dog can cause the dog distress, especially if the owner is very ill. It should be remembered that these are working dogs and should not be petted or distracted from their work while with their owners. Doing so may cause also cause stress to both the person and their dog. Always ask the owner first prior to any interaction with the dog. In this situation, if no relatives/friends can collect the dog it is advisable for Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department staff to contact the local Guide Dog for the Blind Association Training Centre where arrangements will be made to collect the dog and ensure it is looked after and placed into temporary boarding. The dog should be accommodated quietly in A&E under supervision in an office / reception area until collected: further guidance on the management of assistance dogs in healthcare settings other than A& E is available in [Appendix 1](#).

Telephone Hotline for guide dogs and their users - 08000 13 17 17

STAFF – VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Where staff members are employed with visual impairments and have a guide dog, then the departmental manager and individual member of staff will meet with the Infection Prevention Team to discuss relevant issues.

LONG STAY UNITS

This section relates to animals that may be kept in long stay rehabilitation wards or community residential units.

- All pets must have the required vaccinations and a copy kept by the manager of the ward/unit.
- All pets must be free from fleas, ticks and other infestations as well as being in good health. Long-term oral or anti-flea medication is acceptable as prevention of fleas for cats.
- All pets must be clean and free of open skin lesions, diarrhoea, respiratory infections and/or other active infections.
- Patients/residents and staff should wash their hands before and after handling pets.
- Pet's claws/nails must be trimmed and filed.
- Pets must be bathed regularly and have good oral hygiene.
- If the pet shows any sign of illness during its stay, the 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 the hospital/unit premises.
- The animal should have a designated area for food / water away from food preparation areas and animal food should not be kept/stored in the kitchen / food preparation area. Disposable bowls must be used for animal food and water, and a separate tin opener should be used.
- Any patient or staff who have wounds or broken skin must ensure that they are covered at all times with a waterproof dressing.
- If the animal urinates or defecates in the hospital / unit, it is the responsibility of the clinical staff caring for the patient to ensure that the faecal and / or urinary contamination is cleaned up and disposed of immediately and disposed of into orange waste bags. Staff may then disinfect the area. Pregnant women must not perform this task.

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- Healthcare staff should inform the Hotel Services Manager if extra cleaning may be required, for example removal of dog or cat hairs from floors and furnishings.
- Animals should not be allowed to visit or be resident with a patient who is severely immunocompromised, with large wounds or infected skin conditions except in exceptional circumstances and only after liaison with the Infection Prevention Team and the patient's consultant.
- Pets should not normally be permitted on patient's beds. If this is permitted and necessary, ensure an incontinence pad / plastic sheet is placed on the bed for the pet to lie on and dispose of as soon as possible or change sheet regularly.
- Staff should not handle the pet, but if they have an instance to do so, they must wear disposable gloves and aprons.
- NB: It is the owner's responsibility and health care workers to ensure that the animal is not a nuisance to other patients and it does not interfere with patient care. If any patient objects to the animal's presence then arrangements must be made to ensure that the animal is kept away from them.
- Other animals that may be considered in hospital settings on risk assessment and must be discussed with Infection Prevention and Health and Safety

HAMSTER/SMALL ANIMALS

A large wire cage with a plastic tray is permitted to house hamsters. Wood is not permitted as it absorbs urine and quickly becomes smelly, unhygienic and difficult to clean.

Dust extracted shavings or sawdust is permitted for bedding of hamster and should be changed twice weekly.

The cage should be cleaned out weekly and a cleaning record kept. This should be cleaned with detergent and water, and cleaned with a HDUHB approved disinfectant

A shallow food bowl of ceramic or porcelain is required and all items of uneaten food should be removed on a daily basis. Water must be placed in a water bottle with a dispenser and changed daily. Daily washing with detergent and water is adequate followed by rinsing with water.

Staff with colds should not handle the hamster or perform any cleaning procedure as they can potentially infect the hamster.

If you are bitten by a hamster or other animal, please attend the Accident & Emergency Department.

Infections harboured by hamsters may include: -

- Respiratory infections.
- Wet tail (Proliferative ileitis / enteritis). This is a highly contagious disease amongst hamsters and is caused by the bacteria *Campylobacter jejuni*. Affected hamsters can die very quickly, symptoms include diarrhoea [causing wetness around the tail], lethargy, loss of appetite and ruffled coat].
- Diarrhoea.
- Skin diseases e.g. ringworm.

If your hamster shows any of these symptoms or illnesses they should be seen by a vet immediately and a documented record kept of visits and treatment.

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NB: Do not be tempted under any circumstances to give hamsters any antibiotics unless prescribed by a vet. Several antibiotics cause a fatal toxicity in hamsters i.e. penicillin, amoxicillin, ampicillin, streptomycin, tetracyclines, erythromycin, vancomycin, cephalosporins and gentamycin.

Cedar and pine shavings should also be avoided as they emit volatile compounds which can cause skin problems, liver disease and respiratory conditions.

EXCLUSIONS

No animals are permitted in these areas and may only visit these areas in extreme circumstances and only after consultation with the Infection Prevention Team and a risk assessment has been performed. .

- Operating theatres.
- Surgical Day Unit.
- Maternity Unit.
- SCBU.
- ITU/HDU.
- Procedure rooms where dressings or aseptic procedures are to be performed.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

The CEO has ultimate responsibility for infection prevention and control within Hywel Dda University Health Board. This responsibility is delegated to the Director of Nursing, Quality and Patient Experience.

Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Director of Nursing, Quality and Patient Experience

The Director of Nursing, Quality and Patient Experience has delegated responsibility for infection prevention and control in the HDUHB and along with COO must be familiar with this policy and support the implementation of the policy throughout the organisation.

Locality Infection Prevention Team (IPT)

The Locality IPT will promote implementation of this policy in clinical practice.

Ward /Senior Nurse / Heads of Nursing

Ensure all staff are familiar with this policy and ensure the policy is complied with.

All Clinical staff

All health care workers are required to be familiar with this policy and comply with its contents and are responsible for informing the IPT and their manager immediately of any concerns related to poor compliance.

EVALUATION AND MONITORING

Implementation of policies and procedures can only be effective if adequate evaluation and monitoring is used to check the system and ensure any shortcomings are identified and dealt with. Locally, Managers are responsible for initiating an ongoing monitoring process within their areas of responsibility.

From an organisation perspective, the Infection Prevention Team shall be responsible for monitoring that this Policy and that appropriate actions are being taken to maintain patient safety.

REFERENCES

Weber, D.J., and Moore, T. 2015 'Infection Control Experts Outline Guidance for Animal Visitations in Hospitals.' *Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America* March 2015

Appendix 1 – guidelines FOR THE management of assistance dogs within the healthcare setting

INTRODUCTION

Many disabled people rely on an assistance dog as an aid to their mobility, and would find it extremely difficult to manage getting around without it. Guide dogs for the blind and deaf and dogs for the disabled will accompany the patient/visitor/member of the public/member of staff wherever their guidance is needed.

Disabled people who use assistance dogs are protected from discrimination and harassment under the Equality Act 2010. The Act also encourages services to be proactive in creating an inclusive approach and where appropriate “more favourable treatment” can be provided to a disabled person.

SCOPE

These guidelines apply to all staff, agency staff, contractors and staff with honorary contracts. Refer also to the HDUHB 107 - [Volunteers Policy](#).(opens in a new tab)

AIMS

These guidelines are intended to:-

- Advise staff of their relevant obligations under the Equality Act 2010 in relation to the provision of services and employment for disabled people.
- Increase staff knowledge on how to support assistance dog owners and therapy animal owners in healthcare settings
- To minimise restriction of access to guide dogs and the resultant distress to the person, the dog, staff and other patients and, where necessary to minimise the time that the guide dog and owner have to be separated.

Legislative framework

The Equality Act 2010 says that anyone who provides services, goods or facilities to the public cannot refuse to provide their service to a disabled person for a reason relating to that person’s disability. Nor can service providers use a person’s disability as a reason to provide them with a lower standard of service than it offers to other people or a service on worse terms. Doing any of these things is likely to give rise to a disability discrimination claim.

The Act also requires a service provider to make reasonable adjustments to any practice, policy or procedure which makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for a disabled person to make use of the goods, facilities or services in question.

who use assistance dogs.

Legislative requirements relating to Health and Safety at Work, Public Health and Control of Substances Hazardous to Health which requires the provision of a safe environment for services users and staff. These guidelines must therefore be read in conjunction with HDUHB policy on The Management of Resident or visiting Animals in HealthCare Settings.

There is a balance to be struck in complying with all legislation and therefore each situation will require to be risk assessed by the appropriate department/ward manager taking into consideration many and variable factors. Each area must be satisfied that they have appropriate arrangements in place to manage the presence of an assistance dog. Further advice may be sought from Infection Control Team, Workforce and Organisational Development Manager and the Equality and Diversity Advisor/Officer.

RESPONSIBILITIES

All staff:-

- Must adhere to the guidelines
- Must be aware of and comply with the legislation related to animals in healthcare premises
 - Are responsible for minimising the potential of cross infection in line with the Policy for the Management of Assistance/Resident/visiting Animals in Healthcare Settings.
- Are responsible for adhering to the Equality Act 2010 and other relative legislation and HDUHB policies.

All managers:-

- Are responsible for ensuring that staff are aware of the guidelines and associated legislation and policies
- Are responsible for putting in place systems of work to manage and support the presence of an assistance dog in their ward/department to provide a safe environment.

ASSISTANCE DOGS

The Equality Act 2010 encourages services to be proactive in approach in providing care to a disabled person. The HDUHB is obliged to make all reasonable adjustments to ensure equal access to services and employment. There are different types of assistance dogs and staff must be aware of their responsibilities, in creating an environment that improves access, mobility and independence for assistance dog users. Assistance dogs are trained to provide their owner with more independence. An owner who has their assistance dog taken away from them for any reason becomes more dependent and vulnerable.

Assistance Dogs – Key Points

All Assistance dogs:

- Are instantly recognised by the harness they wear and the identification tag on their collar.

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- Handlers must carry an identification card that will display the name of the relevant assistance dog charity they are associated with.
- Undergo rigorous health checks on a regular basis, have a strict set diet and are monitored regularly to ensure they meet the criteria of an assistance dog.
- Are working animals; please therefore seek permission from their handler before touching or feeding the dog;
- Are trained to toilet on command and are therefore unlikely to foul in a public place;
- Will sit or lie quietly beside their handler;
- Will not wander freely throughout premises and its movement must be restricted by keeping it on a lead and in harness;
- Are highly trained working dogs and not pets;
- Are working whenever the harness is in place, when removed this would indicate a rest period for the dog.

Owners must regularly groom their assistance dog for pest control e.g. ticks and fleas. However, this must not take place in the department/ward area and the dog must be taken outside for this procedure. Vaccination and treatments must be up to date.

Consideration must be given to the type of appointment, length of visit, environment and transport services when arranging an appointment for an assistance dog handler for either patient service purposes or employment purposes. If there are delays staff will be required to consider provision of water and toilet relief for the dog. It is also important to advise the handler person of any delays and keep them apprised of the situation.

It is important to give some orientation to the handler in relation to the ward/department environment e.g. verbal explanation, description of layout, in particular, information regarding fire exits or toilets.

Although feeding of an assistance dog on healthcare premises is unlikely and is not encouraged, it must only be fed by the owner.

Consideration must be given to respect the needs of others e.g., cultural, religious and medical as well as to the assistance dog owners. This can be a sensitive aspect of access and tact must be used with all involved. Religious or cultural beliefs have often been cited as a reason for non-admittance of assistance dogs. However, it must be noted that there is a legal requirement to permit access to assistance dogs and such beliefs are not a defence against non-compliance.

STAFF MEMBERS WORKING WITH ASSISTANCE DOGS

In situations where a member of staff is required to have their assistance dog at work to carry out their duties, this must be dealt with sensitively and all reasonable measures taken to facilitate this.

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However, it is recognised that some high risk clinical areas are not suitable to an animal to be present. In this situation, a risk assessment must be undertaken with advice from appropriate staff within Estates, Workforce and Organisational Development and the Infection Control Team. It may not be appropriate in all situations to endorse the presence of an assistance dog.

In situations where an assistance dog is present, consideration is required to whether or not the assistance dog requires to be fed whilst the member of staff is on duty and arrangements for toileting for the assistance dog. The ward/department manager, together with the assistance dog owner is responsible for ensuring appropriate arrangements are in place.

TRAINING

All managers are responsible for ensuring that staff are made aware of these guidelines during departmental/ward induction and team meetings as appropriate.

IMPLEMENTATION

This policy will be implemented through usual policy distribution channels to appropriate areas.

FURTHER INFORMATION

There are five organisations that support the work of Assistance Dogs:

- Guide Dogs;
- Hearing Dogs for Deaf People;
- Dogs for the Disabled (including seizure Dogs);
- Canine Partners;
- Support Dogs.

In order to try and improve access to facilities for assistance dog users in September 2001 Guide Dogs for the Blind (Guide Dogs) launched an "Access for All" campaign. This aims to inform service providers about assistance dogs and overcome common misconceptions about them.

Guide Dogs give free advice to service providers on these matters. It also operates a "hotline" that service providers can contact for information about their access responsibilities on:

08000 13 17 17.

References

Weber, D.J., and Moore, T. (2015). Infection Control Experts Outline Guidance for Animal Visitations in Hospitals. Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America, March 2015.

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