

Purpose:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify the conditions in which animals are permitted to visit Island Health facilities, while safeguarding staff, patients and residents from the risks of transmission of infections from animals to humans.
Cultural Safety and Humility:	<p>Island Health offers programs and services on the unceded and traditional territories of the Coast Salish, Kwakwaka'wakw, and Nuuchah-nulth Peoples.</p> <p>As a signatory to the 2015 Declaration of Commitment to Cultural Safety and Cultural Humility, Island Health is committed to addressing the ongoing impacts of colonialism and Indigenous-specific racism in order to provide a culturally safe, inclusive, healthy and respectful environment.</p> <p>The organization is committed to strengthening diversity, equity and inclusion to enable excellence in health and care for everyone, everywhere, every time. Through these commitments, Island Health strives to deliver the highest possible standard of care and to promote safe workplaces.</p>
Scope:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audience: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff, medical staff, and volunteers of Island Health and its subsidiaries; Physicians, dentists, mid-wives and other allied health professionals with an Island Health appointment and privileges or who contract with Island Health who provide care or services on behalf of Island Health; Medical residents; and Students, trainees, and educators. Environment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Island Health-wide. All care settings across the continuum of care. Exceptions: None
Outcomes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To balance the acknowledged positive benefits associated with animal interactions in healthcare with the understanding and measures to counter the recognized microbial risks. To differentiate between pets, therapy animals and guide or service animals, with associated guidance on facility-based management to ensure infection safety.

1.0 Guideline

- While animals provide many benefits to staff, patients and residents, there are some associated risks that can be addressed through safe practices.
- All animal visitation must be planned and executed following the Island Health [Animal Visitation Policy](#).
- Plans for personal pet visitation should be approved by the Manager or Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL), in accordance with the Animal Visitation Policy and the Animal Screening Checklist ([Appendix A: Animal Screening Checklist](#))

1.1 Infection Prevention and Control Principles

i. Hand Hygiene

- All personnel interacting with animals visiting Island Health will comply Island Health's [Hand Hygiene Policy](#) and [Procedure](#).
- Hand hygiene is one of the most important actions when engaging in animal visitation.

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Issuing Authority:	IPAC-OHS CCC					
Last Revised:	2025-JUL-04	Last Reviewed:	2023-JULY-20	First Issued:	2013-FEB-21	Page 1 of 7

- Hands should be cleaned before and after animal contact.
- Handlers should clean hands between rooms.
- Handlers should use alcohol based hand rub regularly to comply with Island Health's [Hand Hygiene Policy](#).

ii. Staff Clothing

- Staff coming into contact with animals should cover their clothing:
 - Put a clean gown on over work attire; and
 - Remove gown and clean hands after the visit.

iii. Animal Waste

- If animal waste occurs at any time during the visit, the handler is responsible for immediately cleaning of the area with an approved provided clean-up kit.
 - The handler should be provided with the following materials from housekeeping or the nearest unit:
 - Disposable gloves;
 - Plastic bags;
 - A container of disinfectant wipes; and
 - Paper towels.
- Animal waste should not be disposed of in the healthcare waste stream, and disposed of in an external waste receptacle.

iv. Animal Illness

- Animals with any of the following are not permitted to visit:
 - Fleas or ticks;
 - Diarrhea or vomiting;
 - New skin or ear problems such as itching or hair loss; or
 - Sneezing, coughing or discharge from nose or eyes.

1.2 Animal Therapy Programs

- Therapy animal visitation is coordinated through the Island Health Volunteer Resources and Engagement Department.
- Therapy Animal Volunteer Programs must be set up through the Volunteer Resources and Engagement Department in conjunction with the unit manager and/or CNL before the visits commence.
 - The Volunteer Resources and Engagement Department enter into Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with all community partner agencies, who screen their therapy animals. This MOU must be complete before the agency recommends therapy animals for volunteer placement, and therefore, there is no requirement for the unit or program to maintain a record of these animals (there is no requirement to complete Appendix A or B).
 - Further information can be gained from Volunteer@islandhealth.ca.
- Therapy Animal Volunteer Programs include: patient/resident/client-focused programs and staff-focused programs. Each program follows a pre-approved assignment description which is created in collaboration with the Volunteer Resources and Engagement Department, the Infection Prevention and Control Department, and the unit/program/facility requesting the program.

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Issuing Authority:	IPAC-OHS CCC					
Last Revised:	2025-JUL-04	Last Reviewed:	2023-JULY-20	First Issued:	2013-FEB-21	Page 2 of 7



- All staff who visit with a therapy animal who work in clinical areas must:
 - Clean hands prior to visit;
 - Put a clean gown on over work attire; and
 - Remove gown and clean hands after the visit.
- Clinical staff who work in the following areas where they are required to wear hospital issued scrubs, must change into clean scrubs after a visit with a therapy animal, before returning to work:
 - Operating room;
 - Post anesthetic recovery room;
 - Surgical day care; and/or
 - Neonatal intensive care unit.

1.3 Service and Guide Animals

- Service and guide animals are welcome at and may accompany patients and visitors.
- A service animal may be removed from the Clinical Center if the animal:
 - Is not under the control of the patient (or visitor);
 - Is not housebroken;
 - Exhibits aggressive behavior such as snarling, biting, scratching, or teeth baring;
 - Is excessively noisy;
 - Is determined to be infectious or ill by the Clinical Center veterinarian; and/or
 - Otherwise poses a direct risk to the health or safety of people or other service animals.
- Service and guide animals are permitted in all public areas across Island Health in accordance with the [Animal Visitation Policy](#).
- If a patient or resident has a service or guide animal:
 - A plan should be created to support them caring for their own animal, with the support of family or friends as necessary.
 - The plan should include cleaning and disinfection of the area the animal is in, to reduce any risks of transmission to other patients or to the animal.
 - The plan should include where the animal is able to be exercised, and how they will exit the facility for their exercise.

1.4 Personal Pet Visitation

- Personal pets are to visit with the owner/handler only and are not permitted to interact with other patients/residents/staff.
- Pets should be discouraged from licking any patient/resident/client/staff.
- Animal pet owners must be in control of the animal at all times.

i. Acute Care Facilities

- All personal pet visits must have manager approval prior to the visit.
- All pet owners shall comply with the requirements in the Animal Screening Checklist ([Appendix A: Animal Screening Checklist](#)).

Maintained by:	Infection Prevention and Control					
Issuing Authority:	IPAC-OHS CCC					
Last Revised:	2025-JUL-04	Last Reviewed:	2023-JULY-20	First Issued:	2013-FEB-21	Page 3 of 7



- Personal pet visitation approval form shall be completed ([Appendix B: Personal Pet Visitation Approval Form](#)).
- Unit manager or delegate must review the checklist when pet owner arrives.

ii. Hospice, Long-Term Care, Congregate Living and Rehabilitation Units

- All personal pet visits must have manager approval prior to the visit.
- All pet owners must comply with the requirements in the Animal Screening Checklist ([Appendix A: Animal Screening Checklist](#)).
- Personal pet visitation approval form shall be completed ([Appendix B: Personal Pet Visitation Approval Form](#)).
- Unit manager or delegate must review the checklist when pet owner arrives.

1.5 Farm Animals

- Farm animals shall not enter a facility and can be kept in an enclosure outside.
 - Farm animals should not be touched by staff/patients in accordance with the [Animal Visitation Policy](#).
 - Hand hygiene facilities should be provided for those handling the animals, should they need to enter the healthcare facility for any reason.

1.6 Outbreaks

- Visitation during an outbreak will be discontinued unless exceptional circumstances are identified and accommodated.
 - One-to-one pet visitation may be considered on an individual basis following discussion with IPAC.

2.0 Definitions

- **Additional precautions:** Interventions implemented for certain pathogens or clinical presentations in addition to routine infection control practices, to reduce the risk of transmission of microorganisms from patient to patient, patient to health care provider (HCP), and HCP to patient.
- **Certified Guide and Service Animals:** an animal that has received appropriate training and has been certified under the [Guide Dog and Service Dog Act](#) of British Columbia.
- **Clinical areas:** are areas where the patient/resident care occurs and where the supplies and support services for care are kept (e.g., patient/resident rooms, clean and soiled utility rooms, medical rooms, workstation on wheels, treatment/procedure rooms, sterile reprocessing area).
- **Clinical Nurse Leader:** direct care unit leader.
- **Handler:** in the context of this guideline, handlers are generally recognized as those who visit facilities with therapy animals, organized through Island Health's Volunteer Resource and Engagement Department.
- **Guide and Service Animals:** Animals that are certified and regulated under the [Guide Dog and Service Dog Act](#) of British Columbia. They help people who require assistance to avoid hazards or to perform tasks. The animal must have a certificate from an accredited Assistance Dogs International (ADI), the International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF), or by schools previously approved by the Ministry of Justice of British Columbia.
- **Island Health Volunteer Resource and Engagement Department:** Department within Island Health that coordinates volunteer support in care areas.
- **Manager:** non contract leader of a care area.

Maintained by:	Infection Prevention and Control					
Issuing Authority:	IPAC-OHS CCC					
Last Revised:	2025-JUL-04	Last Reviewed:	2023-JULY-20	First Issued:	2013-FEB-21	Page 4 of 7



- **Personal Pet Visitation:** a personal pet that is brought to the facility by family or friend of a patient/resident/client for a short visit during the patient/resident/client's stay in an Island Health facility.
- **Pet:** An animal kept for pleasure or companionship.
- **Therapy Animals:** Also referred to as Animal Therapy Teams. These are organized volunteer programs using screened and trained animals (dogs) and handlers who facilitate interactions between patients and animals to achieve specific physical, social, cognitive and emotional goals.

3.0 Related Island Health Policy Documents

- [Animal Visitation Guideline](#)
- [Hand Hygiene Policy](#)
- [Hand Hygiene Procedure](#)

4.0 References


- Accreditation Canada. A comprehensive hand-hygiene strategy is in place. *Infection prevention and control standards*. [Internet]. Ottawa (ON): Accreditation Canada; [cited 2024 Dec 21]
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5.0 Resources

- [Guide Dog and Service Dog Act](#) (British Columbia, Canada. 2015).
- [Guide and Service Dog Certification](#) (British Columbia, Canada. 2024).
- Island Health [Clostridioides \(Clostridium\) difficile Infection Guideline](#)
- Island Health [Carbapenemase Producing Organisms \(CPO\)](#)

Maintained by:	Infection Prevention and Control					
Issuing Authority:	IPAC-OHS CCC					
Last Revised:	2025-JUL-04	Last Reviewed:	2023-JULY-20	First Issued:	2013-FEB-21	Page 5 of 7

Appendix A: Animal Screening Checklist



Animal Owners

for the safety of residents, patients and staff, please ensure your animal:

☐

is feeling well and does not have vomiting, diarrhea, sneezing, coughing or discharge from nose or eyes

☐

has been bathed in the 24 hours prior to the visit

☐

does not have any new skin or ear problems such as itching or hair loss

☐

is free of ticks and fleas

☐

is not receiving oral or injectable antibiotics or immunosuppressive medication

☐

is fully vaccinated

☐

has not been fed a raw diet in the last 30 days

☐

has received a checkup from a veterinarian and deemed to be healthy in the last 12 months

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Issuing Authority:	IPAC-OHS CCC				
Last Revised:	2025-JUL-04	Last Reviewed:	2023-JULY-20	First Issued:	2013-FEB-21
					Page 6 of 7

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Appendix B: Personal Pet Visitation Approval Form

Personal Pet Visitation Approval Form



Patient/Client: _____

Unit/Room: _____

Animal type: _____ Animal handler: _____

Date(s) of visit: _____

- ☐ The patient/client scheduled for visitation is not on additional infection prevention and control precautions.
- ☐ The handler has completed the Personal Pet Visitation Checklist and confirms that the pet complies with all the requirements.
- ☐ The handler is aware of the most direct access to the unit.
- ☐ The handler is aware to go directly to the patient/client room and not go to other areas in the facility.

Comments: _____

Manager (or delegate)

Date

Maintained by:	Infection Prevention and Control					
Issuing Authority:	IPAC-OHS CCC					
Last Revised:	2025-JUL-04	Last Reviewed:	2023-JULY-20	First Issued:	2013-FEB-21	Page 7 of 7