

GUIDELINES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR PET  
FACILITATED THERAPY IN NEW JERSEY  
INSTITUTIONS

I. All Pets

- A. Companion pets should not pose a threat or nuisance to the patients, staff, or visitors because of size, odor, sound, disposition, or behavioral characteristics. Aggressive or unprovoked threatening behavior should mandate the pet's immediate removal.
- B. Animals which may be approved include: dogs, cats, birds (except carnivorous), fish, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, and domestic rabbits. Wild animals such as turtles and other reptiles, ferrets, and carnivorous birds should not be permitted in the program.
- C. In order to participate, dogs or cats should be either altered or determined not to be in estrus ("heat").
- D. Sanitary constraints:
  1. Pets should be prohibited from the following areas:
    - a. Food preparation, storage, and serving areas, with the exception of participating resident's bedroom;
    - b. Areas used for the cleaning or storage of human food utensils and dishes;
    - c. Vehicles used for the transportation of prepared food;
    - d. Nursing stations, drug preparation areas, sterile and clean supply rooms;
    - e. Linen storage areas; and
    - f. Areas where soiled or contaminated materials are stored.
  2. Food handlers should not be involved in the cleanup of animal waste.
  3. The administrator is responsible for acceptable pet husbandry practices and may delegate specific duties to any other staff members except food handlers. The areas of responsibility include: feeding and watering, food cleanup/cage cleaning, exercising, and grooming.

4. Spilling or scattering of food and water should not lessen the standard of housekeeping or contribute to an increase in vermin or objectionable odor.
  5. Dogs and cats must be effectively housebroken and provisions made for suitably disposing of their body wastes.
  6. Animal waste should be disposed of in a manner which prevents the material from becoming a community health or nuisance problem and in accordance with applicable sanitation rules and ordinances. Accepted methods include disposal in sealed plastic bags (utilizing municipally approved trash removal systems) or via the sewage system for feces.
  7. Proper and frequent handwashing shall be a consideration of all persons handling animals.
- E. Animals found to be infested with external parasites (ticks, fleas, or lice) or which show signs of illness (for example, vomiting or diarrhea) should be immediately removed from the premises and taken to the facility's veterinarian.
- F. The parent or guardian of a child bitten by a dog, cat, or other animal, when no physician attends such child, shall, within 12 hours after first having knowledge that the child was so bitten, report to the person designated by law or by the local board, under authority of law, to receive reports of reportable communicable diseases in the municipality in which the child so bitten may be the name, age, sex, color, and precise location of the child (N.J.S.A. 26:4-80).  
If an adult is bitten by a dog, cat, or other animal and no physician attends him, the adult, or, if he is incapacitated, the person caring for him, shall report to the person designated by law or by the local board of health to receive reports of communicable diseases in the municipality in which the adult so bitten may be the name, age, sex, color, and the precise location of the adult. The report shall be made within 12 hours after the adult was so bitten, or if he is incapacitated, the report shall be made within 12 hours after the person caring for him shall first have knowledge that the adult was so bitten (N.J.S.A. 26:4-81).
- G. The local health department must be promptly notified by telephone of any pet that dies on the premises.

1. If the deceased is a bird, the body should be immediately taken to the facility's veterinarian. If the veterinarian is not available, the deceased bird should be securely wrapped in impermeable wrapping material and frozen until veterinary consultation is available. Payment for a laboratory examination should be the responsibility of the institution, or the pet's owner.
  2. If the deceased is another type of animal, the body should not be disposed until it is determined by the local department of health that rabies testing is not necessary.
- H. The rights of residents who do not wish to participate in the pet program must be considered first. Patients not wishing to be exposed to animals should have available a pet free area within the participating facility.

## II. Visiting Pets

A. Visiting pets are defined as any animal brought into the facility on a periodic basis for pet therapy purposes. The owner should accompany the animal and be responsible for its behavior and activities while it is visiting at the facility.

B. Visiting dogs should:

1. Be restricted to the areas designated by the facility administrator;
2. Maintain current vaccination against canine diseases of distemper, hepatitis, leptospirosis, parainfluenza, parvovirus, coronavirus, bordetella (kennel cough), and rabies. Proof of vaccination shall be included on a health certificate that is signed by a licensed veterinarian and kept on file at the facility;
3. Be determined not to be in estrus ("heat") at the time of the visit;
4. Be licensed and wear an identification tag on the collar, choker chain, or harness, stating the dog's name, the owner's name, address, and telephone number; and
5. Be housebroken if more than four months of age. Younger dogs may be admitted subject to the approval of the administrator.

C. Visiting cats should:

1. Maintain current vaccination against feline pneumonitis, panleukopenia, rhinotracheitis, calicivirus, chlamydia, and rabies. Proof of vaccination should be included on a health certificate that is signed by a licensed veterinarian and kept on file at the facility; and
2. Determined not be in estrus ("heat") at the time of the visit.

D. Visiting hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, domestic rabbits, laboratory mice, or rats:

1. The owner should be liable and responsible for the animal's activities and behavior.

E. No visiting birds should be allowed to participate in the program.

### III. Residential Pets

A. Residential pets are defined as any animal that resides at a facility in excess of four hours during any calendar day and is owned by a staff member, patient, the facility, or a facility approved party. The financial responsibility for the residential animal's maintenance is the animal owner's responsibility.

B. All documentation of compliance will be maintained by the facility administrator in a file for review and inspection. The official health records should include the rabies vaccination certificate and a current health certificate.

C. Residential animals should have a confinement area separate from the patients where they can be restricted when indicated. An area should be available for each participating unit and should be approved by the administrator.

D. A licensed veterinarian should be designated as the facility's veterinarian and should be responsible for establishing and maintaining a disease control program for residential pets.

E. Specific Species:

1. Residential dogs should:

a. Maintain current vaccination against canine diseases of distemper, hepatitis, leptospirosis, parainfluenza, parvovirus and rabies. In addition, the animal's file should include a currently valid Rabies Vaccination Certificate, NASPHV #51. A three-year type rabies vaccine should be utilized;

b. Have an annual heartworm test commencing at one year of age and should be maintained on heartworm preventive medication;

c. Have a fecal examination for internal parasites twice yearly. Test results should be negative before the dog's initial visit to the facility;

d. Follow the recommended procedures of the facility's veterinarian for controlling external parasites;

e. Be neutered;

f. Be licensed with the municipality and wear an identification tag on the collar, choker chain, or harness, stating the dog's name, the owner's name, address, and telephone number;

g. Have a health certificate completed by a licensed veterinarian within one week before the animal's initial visit to the facility. The certificate should be updated annually thereafter;

- h. Be immediately removed from the premises and taken to the facility's veterinarian if infested with internal or external parasites, vomit, or have diarrhea, or show signs of a behavioral change or infectious disease. Medical records of the veterinarian's diagnosis and treatment should be maintained in the animal's file. The animal should not have patient contact until authorized by the facility's veterinarian;
  - i. Be housebroken if more than four months of age. Younger dogs may be admitted subject to the requirements of the administrator;
  - j. Be fed in accordance with the interval and quantity recommended by the facility's veterinarian. Feeding and watering bowls should be washed daily and stored separately from dishes and utensils used for human consumption;
  - k. Be provided fresh water daily and have 24-hour access to the water dish;
  - l. Be provided a suitable bedding area. Bedding should be cleaned or changed as needed. Dirty bedding should be processed or disposed of as necessary;
  - m. Be permitted outside the facility only if under the supervision of a staff member, a responsible person or within a fenced area; and
  - n. Be regularly groomed and receive a bath whenever indicated.
2. Residential birds:
- a. Should be treated by a licensed veterinarian with an approved chlortetracycline treatment regimen prior to being housed at the institution to ensure the absence of psittacosis. The period of treatment varies between 30 to 45 days and is species-dependent. A signed statement from the veterinarian indicating such treatment should be kept in the bird's file; and
  - b. That die, or are suspected of having psittacosis, should be immediately taken to the facility's veterinarian. In the event the bird dies and the veterinarian is not available, the bird's body should be securely wrapped in impermeable wrapping material and frozen until veterinary consultation is available.

3. Residential hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, domestic rabbits, laboratory mice or rats should be examined yearly by a licensed veterinarian for health status. A health certificate should be completed for each animal or group of animals. Any animal that becomes sick or dies should be promptly taken to the facility's veterinarian.