

Section: UTMB On-line Documentation	01.35 - Policy
Subject: Infection Control & Healthcare Epidemiology Policies and Procedures	7/25/2025 - Reviewed
Topic: 01.35 - Animal Assisted Therapy	2000 - Author

01.35 Animal Assisted Therapy

Purpose	The purpose of this policy is to develop procedures that provide for the safety of patients, visitors and employees involved in Animal Assisted Therapy.
Audience	All employees of UTMB hospitals and clinics, contract workers, volunteers, and students
Access to Therapy	Staff nurses will schedule Animal Assisted Therapy for their patients by calling Child Life Services or Volunteer Services if the patient is an adult.
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All animals will have an initial animal behavioral evaluation in order to qualify for the program. The animal may qualify through the PAWS or the Delta Society programs. • The animal will have an annual medical evaluation and must always meet the following health requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Be under a veterinarian's care ○ Be parasite free ○ Be on a flea control program ○ Have immunizations current ○ Be free of lesions or hair loss ○ Be bathed and have reasonable oral hygiene ○ Have nails trimmed and filed • Maintain appropriate temperament Animals will be assessed each time they visit a UTMB unit. (See Appendix A: Animal Assisted Therapy Visitation Record). In addition, the animal will be checked for basic cleanliness. • Reptiles and birds will not be allowed to participate in this program. • A UTMB patient may only interact with their animal while hospitalized if they qualify through the guidelines outlined by the UTMB Animal Assisted Therapy Policy. • If at any time UTMB staff feel the behavior of an animal is aggressive or inappropriate, the animal and the volunteer will be asked to leave.

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Required Documentation

- Volunteers who wish to bring an animal into the hospital for Animal Assisted Therapy must schedule an appointment with the UTMB liaison for the area to be visited by the animal.
- Upon arrival at UTMB, the liaison will access the Animal Assisted Therapy web site and access the visitation record for the animal.
- The Health Certificate expiration date will be checked at the time of each visit.
- The visitation record will be completed by the UTMB liaison at each visit.
- The initial and annual evaluation forms for the animal will be kept in a file in the volunteer office. The volunteer office will change the expiration date of the Health Certificate in the database when necessary.

Visitation Protocol

- Animals must enter and exit the hospital in a carrier or on a 3-foot leash.
- Animals are to be on a leash or within arm's reach of therapy personnel at all times.
- Animals will be allowed in the hospital only when accompanied by designated personnel.
- Animals will not be allowed in areas where food is being prepared.
- Animals will be checked in with the UTMB liaison prior to visiting any patient care areas. At this time, the animal's medical record will be checked to assure that it is current. At the time of entry and prior to visiting patients, each animal will be screened for:
 1. Recent history of antibiotic therapy for an infection
 2. Evidence of gum or ear infection
 3. Presence of bandages
 4. Signs of gastrointestinal disease (vomiting or diarrhea)
 5. Signs of respiratory disease (cough)
- Animal visits will take place in pre-approved areas only.
- Nursing units will be notified prior to animal visitation.

Patients Restriction

Animals should not be allowed in ICUs (including neonatal), immunocompromised units/patients (chemotherapy, neutropenia (neutrophils < 1000), HIV infection, or immunoglobulin deficiencies, etc.), any isolation room, and for patients who have impaired cognition should not have interactions with visiting pets.

Patients with contraindications for animal-assisted therapy may have such therapy only by approval of Infection Control & Healthcare Epidemiology (ICHE). The Charge Nurse will review records to ensure that only patients who are able to participate are included.

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Community Volunteer Requirements

- People who wish to volunteer for the animal-assisted therapy program must be approved by the UTMB volunteer office.
- Volunteers must always wear nametags when in the hospital.
- Volunteers must be free of contagious diseases and avoid visiting if they have been exposed to a contagious disease.
- Volunteers will check animals for cleanliness, fleas, temperament, and general health immediately prior to each visit.
- Volunteers will allow the animals to exercise and eliminate before visitations and provide ample water and rest before and during visitations.
- Volunteers will supervise, discipline and control animals by leash, command and/or cage always during visitation.
- The volunteer will provide any clean-up necessary by:
 - Picking up the feces or urine with a paper towel.
 - Placing the soiled material in a plastic bag.
 - Spraying the area with disinfectant.
 - Wiping the area with a clean paper towel.
 - Disposing of the paper towel in the plastic bag.
 - Placing secured plastic bag in designated area or container.
 - Washing hands promptly.

If an animal urinates, defecates, or vomits on a patient, or on a patient's equipment or bedding, housekeeping and staff are to be notified *immediately*, and an incident report will be completed.

References

- Rekha Murthy, MD; Gonzalo Bearman, MD, MPH; et al. Animals in Healthcare Facilities: Recommendations to Minimize Potential Risks. Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology. May 2015, Vol. 36, No.5.

