

Pregnant women advised to avoid animals giving birth

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Pregnant women are advised to avoid close contact with farmed animals that are giving, or have recently given, birth. Infectious diseases sometimes carried by these animals can risk a mother-to-be's health and that of her unborn child.

Avoiding infection

Reports of these infections are extremely rare. But it's important that pregnant women are aware of the potential risks associated with close contact with these animals and that they take precautions.

It's also important to note that the risks:

- are not only during the spring
- are not only associated with sheep – cows and goats that have recently given birth can also carry similar infections

To reduce the possible risk of infection, pregnant women should:

- not help a ewe to lamb
- not provide help with a cow that is calving or a nanny goat that is kidding
- avoid contact with aborted or new-born lambs, calves or kids or with the afterbirth, birthing fluids or materials (for example, bedding) contaminated by such birth products
- avoid handling clothing (including washing), boots or any materials which may have come into contact with animals that have recently given birth, their young or afterbirths (potentially contaminated clothing will be safe to handle after being washed on a hot cycle)
- make sure people they'll be in contact with who have been attending lambing ewes or other animals giving birth take appropriate health and hygiene precautions – this includes the wearing of personal protective equipment and clothing, and adequate washing to remove any potential contamination

Pregnant women should seek medical advice if they experience fever or flu-like symptoms, or if concerned that they could have picked up an infection from a farm environment.

Reducing risks

Farmers and livestock keepers have a responsibility to reduce the risks to pregnant women, including members of their family, the public and professional staff visiting farms.

They should consult their veterinary surgeon about suitable vaccination programmes and any other disease control measures in sheep, cattle and goats.

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