



Town of Hamilton Board of Health

KEEPING OF ANIMALS – FACT SHEET

The purpose of this FACT SHEET is to provide rationale on the role of the Hamilton Board of Health in the keeping of animals. The following FAQ's are for your consideration.

1. Why is your public health system concerned with the keeping of animals?

Animals can carry pathogens (germs) that can cause diseases in humans, which is a public health concern. These diseases, called "zoonotic" diseases, can be caused by viruses, bacteria, fungi, and parasites. According to the CDC, three out of every four new or emerging infectious diseases in people come from animals, and they infect millions of Americans each year.

2. What are some specific diseases caused by the keeping of animals?

Brucellosis, Campylobacter, Anthrax, Leptospirosis, Psittacosis, various parasites.

3. What about Avian Flu?

Scientists have proven how cows have spread H5N1 bird flu across the country and infected other cows, wild birds and even mammals like cats and raccoons.

4. Do mosquitos and horses cause disease to humans?

There are three mosquito-borne diseases that every horse owner should recognize and vaccinate against: Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE), Western Equine Encephalitis (WEE) and West Nile Virus (WNV). All three diseases are routinely documented in humans in Massachusetts.

5. Can private well and surface water pollution occur from careless keeping of animals?

Animal manure has a significant amount of nitrogen and phosphorus. These compounds can be harmful when they enter the drinking water. If not managed properly, horses and other livestock manure may infiltrate drinking water wells. Furthermore, if ammonia from horse manure comes into contact with surface waters, it can cause excessive algae growth and blooms ultimately harming the waterways.

6. What about safety of the farm animals?

Animal protection entered the American colonial record in December 1641, when the Massachusetts General Court enacted its comprehensive legal code.

For all of these reasons, Local Boards of Health in Massachusetts have a duty to oversee keeping of animals by promulgating reasonable regulations. Licensing, permitting, and inspecting sites where animals are kept are basic requirements. In sum, Local Board of Health regulations provide legal requirements and guidelines for the keeping of animals.