

School and College Trips – Risk Assessment for trips to Tropiquaria

The legal burden on the production of a risk assessment for a school and/or college trip rests with the school or college organising the trip. This is because they may have knowledge about their specific students that the venue would not have (e.g. students with epilepsy, allergies, etc.) However the following notes, although not exhaustive, may assist on making that task easier.

1. Consider the trip to and from Tropiquaria. Statistically the most dangerous part of a visit! Confirm that your travel arrangements and the companies involved have sufficient appropriate seating and have allowed a suitable travel time to allow for slow-moving vehicles, road works etc. Listen to local radio, contact RAC/AA as appropriate on the day *re.* roadworks and other possible delays. Have a contingency plan for students or staff with a motion sickness history.
2. Arrival at the site. Be aware that the car park, like any other car park, may also be used by delivery vehicles and by members of the public arriving independently. Try to limit the risks by keeping students and staff together and moving them to the entrance without undue delay. People returning to transport to collect forgotten items should be made aware of traffic movements.
3. On admission you will usually be greeted by a staff member from Tropiquaria who will give a short briefing, including any current site related issues. As a large site which is centred on a grade 2 listed building there will possibly be some building or renovation work in progress – you will be advised to remain clear of this. Please observe any barriers put up for this reason. Similarly permanent barriers within the grounds are there for a reason and should not be crossed. Please note that Tropiquaria does have “permit to work” type policies for the use of power and hot tools in public areas.
4. General movement around the area – Tropiquaria often has disabled visitors and older visitors. In addition keeping staff may use trolleys during their duties, for these reasons, to avoid collision dangers, please do not run around the site. Shouting or making other loud noises may disturb other visitors and/or the animals. Making similar noises to some of the animals may also disturb them. Please do not do this as a matter of consideration mainly, rather than safety.
5. During wet weather Tropiquaria has areas that may become muddy. We are slowly dealing with these, but we do have a high water-table and Somerset can be very damp at times! When we do get muddy there are usually alternative routes to the effected part of the park. If there has been much rain before your visit please telephone us for advice.
6. Animal contact – Tropiquaria does, where possible, like to encourage visitors to handle animals. We believe that this is a useful educational tool, and can be

beneficial for the animals too. There is always a small risk of disease being passed from the animals to humans in this way, (and *vice versa*). These diseases are referred to as zoonoses. The risks may be minimised by washing hands thoroughly after animal handling, using antiseptic soap and preventing touching of mouth, nose and eyes in the interim period.

Students who may have a depressed immune system for whatever reason should, generally, discuss animal contact with their physician, this clearly applies to contact with their own pets etc. The animals that are selected for handling are selected on the basis of their docility and health. Animals may only be handled under the supervision of trained members of Tropiquaria staff.

7. Play facilities - Tropiquaria has a range of play facilities including two full size pirate ships, a play fort, including zip wire and a climbing frame within the “castles” building. Thought should be given as to whether to totally prohibit the children (and staff!) from access to these or whether to set rules to limit the time or what can be played upon. Tropiquaria does not undertake to supervise the use of these facilities and has signs to clearly indicate this. Tropiquaria staff may intervene in play if it is seen to be damaging, obviously dangerous or upsetting to other visitors. It is the policy of Tropiquaria not to admit unaccompanied children and to request that parents and guardians do supervise the use of play facilities by their “charges” properly.
8. In the puppet theatre there may be flashing lights depending upon which show is being performed. There will be a sign at the entrance to this effect. Epileptics who are light sensitive should be aware of this, as should those with migraines, etc. that may be triggered by flashing lights. Because the theatre will be in darkness for part of the show there is no admission during the show and any child needing to leave should be accompanied by an adult. How to do this will be clearly explained at the beginning of each show.
9. There is always a qualified first-aider on site. Lost children and those requiring first aid should report at once to the gift shop from where the appropriate assistance will be called. Any other problems should also, initially be mentioned in the shop.

For further help see:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/schooltrips/>

Post Griffin Report Addendum

The Griffin Report (published 15th June 2010) looked at the problems with *E coli* 0157 and the infections with this organism that occurred at Godstone Farm in Surrey in 2009. Godstone farm was/is an open farm where children petted farm animals. Many of the cases occurred as a result of the slow response of the Health Protection Agency and local authority to the initial cases. *E. coli* seems to be a risk mainly from farm animals and it is not likely that reptiles carry it. There are other organisms that reptiles carry sometimes that may be passed to humans. This is rare, but can happen. In general these infections, although unpleasant, are less of a risk than *E. coli* 0157

One of the points that came out of the report is that there is currently little regulation of “Open Farms” Tropiquaria is not an open farm but a zoo and is licensed under the Zoo Licensing Act which sets certain standards through the Secretary of States’ standards for zoos.

Despite the small risk from handling the animals at Tropiquaria we support many of the suggestions in the Griffin report and parents, teachers and carers are urged to supervise the washing of hands by children and other persons requiring supervision. Although there is little evidence-based publication to this effect washing of hands is currently thought to be more effective than the use of hand gels. Griffin acknowledges that both may be of use if done correctly.

For biology teachers and health advisers who find this subject of interest we recommend

“Compendium of Measures to Prevent Disease Associated with Animals in Public Settings, 2011” (National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, Inc).

This is available free of charge on line at

http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr6004a1.htm?s_cid=rr6004a1_w

Although mention of some of the diseases in this paper is not relevant to the UK the general matter is dealt with in a clear and constructive way by American professionals more used to dealing with zoonotic disease than their British counterparts.