

Children and Hounds – hunt hygiene failures at Boxing Day and New Year's Day meets.

This information is also useful for County Shows.

Background

1. At most Boxing Day Meets, **children are allowed unrestricted access to hounds**. They can stroke the hounds and touch them as much as they please. Hounds jump up at the children (sometimes in groups) and put their faces close to the child's face, sometimes licking them. Hounds may pass from child to child, freely.
2. Hounds are kept together in kennels, where **diseases can easily pass** from dog to dog.
3. Hounds are fed on **raw fallen stock**. These are farm animals which have died in the fields, often of no known cause.

Risks, Pathogens and References

4. Farm animals are known to carry a multitude of **pathogens and diseases which they can pass to people**.
5. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/topics/zoonoses.htm> Hounds are likely to have consumed any of these pathogens when fed the raw stock.
6. Dogs can pass diseases to humans <https://www.dogsforgood.org/good-advice/zoonoses/>
7. **Children are particularly vulnerable** to picking up diseases from animals. They have immature immune systems and often put their hands in their mouths.

Boxing Day 2023

8. AAF received 17 detailed reports of Boxing Day meets around the country. Our members were asked to attend the meets and inconspicuously record evidence of unhygienic interaction between hounds and children. *NB – while it is entirely legal to take video of anyone who appears in public, this report only shares still images, with the children's faces obscured.*
9. Out of the 17 Boxing Day Meets that have been reported to AAF, not one of them offered any hand-washing facilities to children.

10. Some hunts tried to hold their hounds in one designated place. However, this failed as there were no barriers and no one stayed in control of the hounds. More often than not, the hounds left the designated place and ran among the crowd.
11. One hunt kept their hounds behind barriers. However, children put their hands through the barriers and touched the hounds anyway.
12. Discipline of both hounds and children was lax. Hunt staff were rarely seen to intervene, except to encourage the children to touch the hounds. Huntsmen sat on horses and observed, but took no action concerning hounds and children. Children were often at some distance from their parents.
13. Hunt staff offered no advice to parents or children concerning hygiene.
14. Hounds were seen defecating and urinating at the meets. The faeces stayed on the ground (often in long wet grass) and much of it was not removed, even after the meet had ended.
15. Hounds were observed eating horse dung. Immediately afterwards, the hounds were observed being petted by children.
16. At three Boxing Day meets, hunt servants were seen to collect some of the dog faeces after the meets and then throw it in the bushes.

Proper Practice

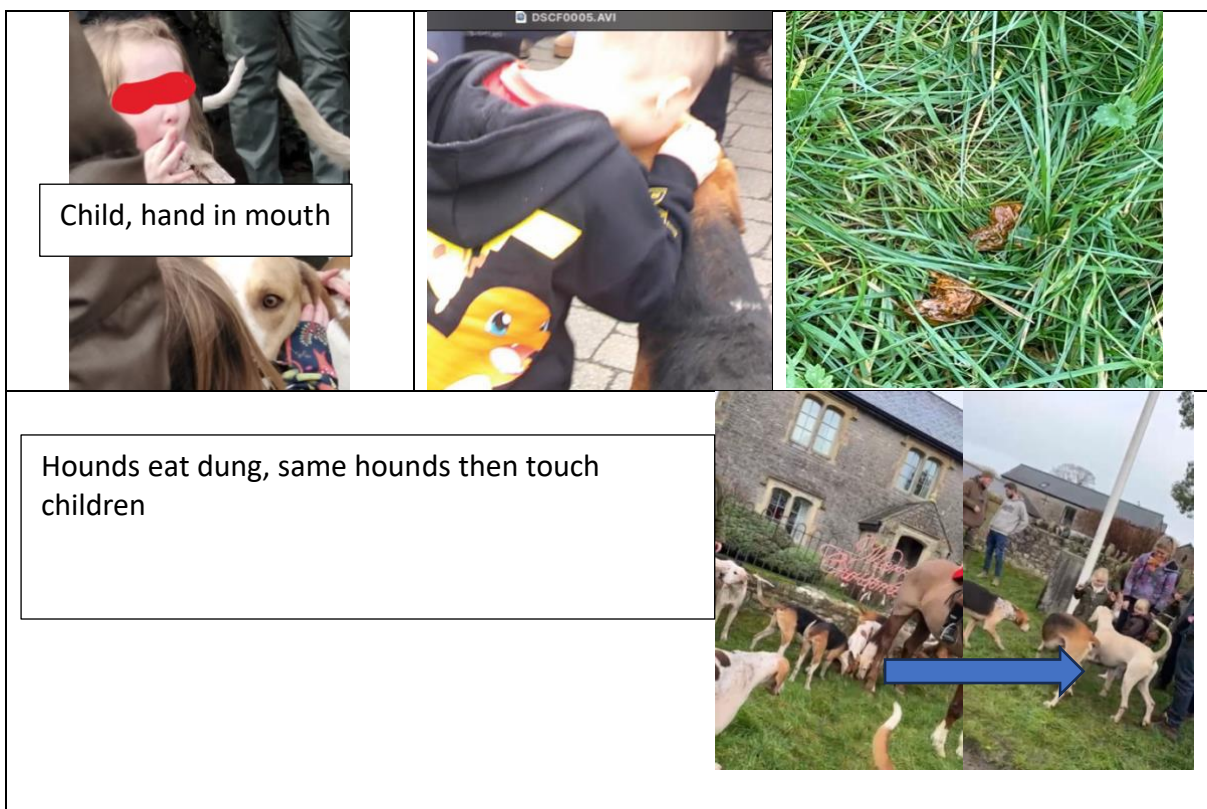
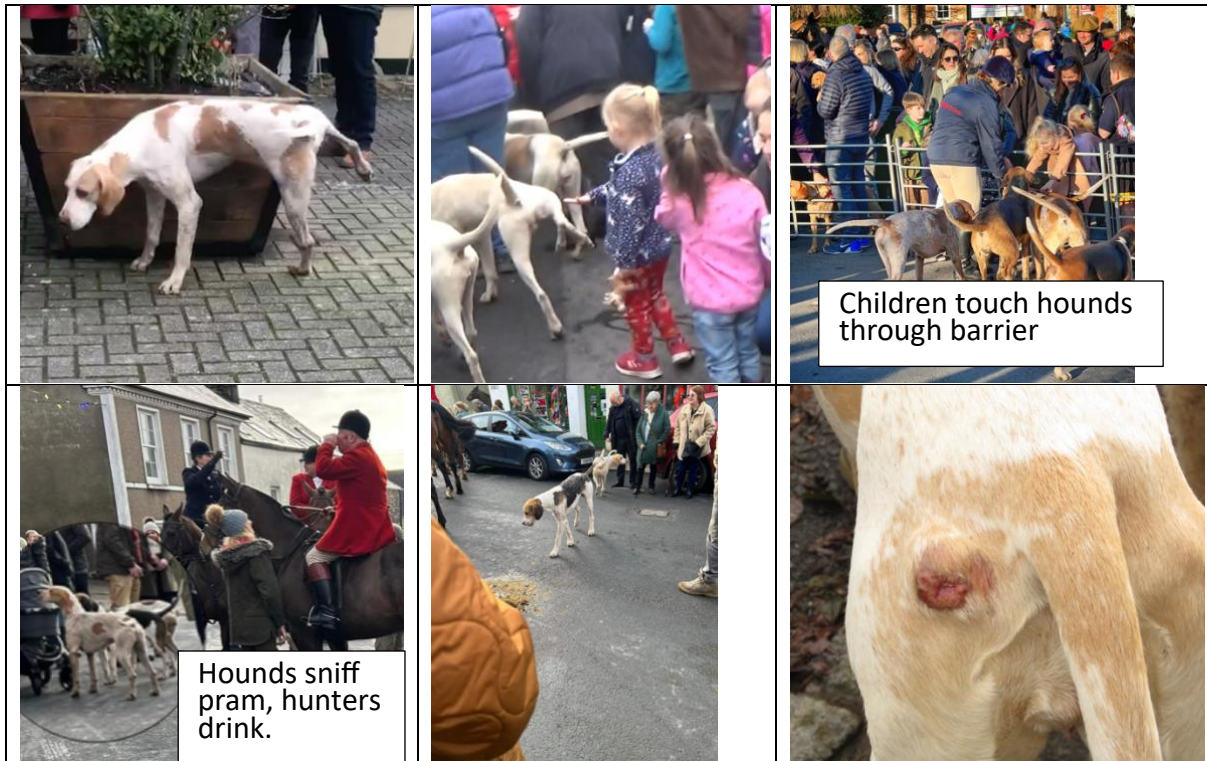
17. Children/hound interaction at meets can be compared with the activities of petting zoos. Petting zoos must have high standards of hygiene
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/topics/visitor-attractions.htm>

The HSE advice says this

- Tell [visitors] about the risks and where and when they will be able to use washing facilities (in particular, remind nail biters, pen chewers and thumb suckers).
 - Provide information signs to remind them;
 - alcohol gels and wipes are **not** a substitute for hand washing
 - washing facilities should be sufficient for the expected numbers of visitors needing to use them at one time, and should include running water (preferably warm), soap and paper towels
18. Boxing Day meets are held outdoors, with no running water available. Hand gels and hand wipes are not sufficient.

Evidence

NB this is just a very small selection of evidence. All of it was taken around the country at various Boxing Day Meets. Much more is available on request from info@actionagainstfoxhunting.org





Conclusion

19. Hounds should not be brought to Boxing Day meets which are held in a field. It is highly unlikely that hunts can provide the expected washing facilities sufficient for the number of visitors. Gels and handwipes are not sufficient.
20. Children will always want to pet the dogs. At a public event, where a great deal is going on and it is often chaotic, it will be impossible to keep the children away from the hounds, even if they are kept behind barriers.
21. If the hunt meets in a venue (such as a pub or a sports club), each child should be taken to a place where there is warm running water, soap and paper towels, and supervised when thoroughly cleaning their hands. This should happen *every time* a child touches a hound. All parents and children should attend a safety advice meeting with hunt staff prior to engaging with hounds.
22. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 applies to hunts. It is a criminal offence to breach H&S legislation. Breaches must be reported to the Health and Safety Executive. See "Checklist" below for more details.
23. The Environmental Health Department at the Local Authority are the correct authority for reporting breaches of HSE legislation parish councils, town councils and other venues (eg pubs). The Environmental Health Dept is usually at the County Council, but may be found at the District Council (if there is one). The set up will be individual to the county.

Checklist of Actions

- If you attended a Boxing Day or New Year's Day meet to collect evidence, whether it was in a private venue, or a public venue, check all photos and videos of children interacting with hounds.
- As none of the hunts we saw had any hygiene facilities, you can report the hunt AND the venue to the Health and Safety Executive AND the Local Authority, Environmental Health Department.
- You can use this report, and adapt it to make your own report, using your own photos and evidence.
- Use this form to report to the Health and Safety Executive
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/contact/tell-us-about-a-health-and-safety-issue.htm>
- Find the Environmental Health Department on your own County Council website (or District Council, if appropriate) and report both the venue and the hunt to them.

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