

Staying safe around cattle

Recent incidents involving cattle have underlined the potential dangers they pose to walkers, as people head out to enjoy the countryside this bank holiday weekend.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), however, is stressing that serious incidents involving cattle and walkers are rare, while reminding both farmers and walkers to do all they can to keep everyone safe.

Farmers have a legal responsibility to manage their herds to reduce risk to people using footpaths and other rights of way.

HSE regularly investigates incidents involving cattle and the public. A proportion of these incidents involve serious injury and sometimes death. Incidents often involve cows with calves or bulls, and the person injured often has a dog.

HSE's published statistics show that in the five years leading up to March of this year, nine members of the public died after being attacked or trampled by cattle.

Members of the public can find out about steps to safely enjoy the countryside and respect farming activities by following Government advice in the [The Countryside Code](#).

Advice includes:

- Give livestock plenty of space. Their behaviour can be unpredictable, especially when they are with their young.
- Keep your dog under effective control to make sure it stays away from livestock. It is good practice wherever you are to keep your dog on a lead around livestock.
- Let your dog off the lead if you feel threatened by livestock. Releasing your dog will make it easier for you both to reach safety.

While many thousands of people enjoy the countryside and use the extensive network of footpaths, bridleways, and public access land every day, activities such as walking through or near cattle can be hazardous.

HSE inspector Wayne Owen said: "All large animals can be a risk to people. Even a gentle knock from a cow can result in people being crushed or falling. All cattle should be treated with respect.

"Farmers should carefully consider the animals put into fields with footpaths, for example cows and calves are best kept in alternative fields. Even docile cattle, when under stress, perhaps because of the weather, illness, unusual disturbance, or when maternal or other instincts are aroused, can become aggressive.

"Follow farming industry and HSE guidance to reduce the risk from animals and

help people to enjoy your land and pass through smoothly.”

Key considerations for farmers and landowners include:

- No dairy bulls should be kept in fields with a public right of way (PROW) at any time.
- Where possible avoid putting cattle, especially cows with calves, in fields with PROW.
- Where there is a need to keep cattle with calves or a bull in a field with PROW do all that you can to keep animals and people separated. Consider the use of fencing (permanent or temporary e.g. electric fencing). This is particularly important at busy times or where PROW are heavily used.
- Assess the temperament of any cattle before putting them into a field with PROW.
- If cattle, especially cows with calves, do need to be put into fields with PROW, keep this period to a minimum.
- Position feed and water troughs away from the PROW and away from PROW entrances and exits to the field.
- Put in place a system to monitor any cattle in fields with PROW at least on a daily basis. It may be worth recording this.
- Consider culling any animal that shows signs of aggression.
- Any animal that has shown any sign of aggression must not be kept in a field with PROW.
- Clearly sign post all PROW across the farm. Display signage at all entrances to the field stating what is in the field (cows with calves / bulls).

Notes to editors:

1. HSE Guidance for England and Wales on putting cattle into fields with public rights of way / public access can be found here: [Cattle and public access in England and Wales \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/cattle-public-access/)
1. HSE guidance for Scotland can be found here: [Cattle and public access in Scotland: Advice for farmers, landowners and other livestock keepers AIS17 \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/scotland/cattle-public-access/).
1. There is also guidance available from other stakeholders for visitors to the countryside and farmers / landowners eg [The Countryside Code – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-countryside-code).