# Safety for Animal and Plant Encounters

Our Zoo has wild animals which can carry diseases and so make us ill through bacteria, viruses and molds which are invisible. Wild animals and plants defend against attack, using poisons, allergens, irritants and sharps. Bright markings often advertise these defences – so the prettier the plant or insect, the more dangerous it is likely to be – but we humans can use our brains to protect ourselves.

## What are the risks?

* **Disease transmission:** Our insects (or pests which may live near them) may carry diseases which can harm us if we touch the animals, their waste, or foods contaminated by them. Remember, butterflies are beautiful – but they are still flies.
* **Allergic reactions:** Some people may be allergic to our insects or plants and get allergic reactions ranging from a itchy skin to severe asthma. Just as you can get asthma from dust mites that live on the dead cells that fall from our skins, or from pollen or sap, so it is here.
* **Poisoning:** Our caterpillars feed on plants. As plants evolved poisons to try and stop the browsing, caterpillars evolved immunity, so plants evolved to be more toxic. Humans have never eaten those plants, so you are not immune to poisons in the plants or insects.
* **Physical injury:** Nettles sting with setae – little hairs which inject an irritant into your skin. We don’t have nettles inside, but other plants have thorns, and many caterpillars have irritant setae which can get stuck on your skin, and if you then touch your face they will make your eyes very sore.

## How can you keep yourself safe?

* **Don’t eat or drink anything inside the Zoo and keep your hands away from your face:** Wash your hands before you leave the enclosure in case you have touched anything inside – and wash your hands again before you next eat or drink, just to be sure.
* **Don’t touch the insects, their feeding stations or handle plants:** The idea is to get up close here, but always stay on the path. Parents of children under 5 years and carers of vulnerable people must stay with them to keep an eye out, just in case. If butterflies get close to your face, just blow them away or lightly brush them off so that you don’t hurt them.
* **Be aware of allergies:** If you or anyone in your group has a known allergy to insects or plants such as Eczema, Hay Fever or Asthma, take your usual precautions (such as antihistamines or carrying your inhaler) and tell a responsible adult so they can help if needed.
* **Follow the instructions of our staff during Supervised Animal Encounters:** Our staff are trained to help you handle our insects safely during special Animal Encounter Sessions.
  + **Wash your hands before you start so you don’t pass infection to our insects**
  + **Wear Personal Protective Equipment (gloves) if so advised by The Keeper**
  + **Use freshly made bait exactly as demonstrated by The Keeper**
  + **Handle the insect as shown by The Keeper so that you cause no harm**
  + **Dispose of excess bait and PPE as instructed by The Keeper**
  + **Wash and dry your hands right away**

**USE YOUR HEAD – STAY SAFE**