

Do Hedgehogs Make Good Pets For Children?

Is a hedgehog the right type of pet for young children?

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Q: Are hedgehogs good pets for children? My two boys love hedgehogs (I think this may be associated with the Sonic the Hedgehog game), and they want a pet. I'm not sure if a hedgehog would be appropriate for them. I have no problem taking responsibility for most of the care as the boys are only 7 and 9, but I was worried about children's tendency to be a little rough with pets, health risks (for both boys and hedgehog), that sort of thing.

A: I believe that a hedgehog can make a nice pet for a child age 5 to 10 if the hedgehog is a family pet and an adult supervises the child when the hedgehog is out of the cage. Handling a hedgehog can be tricky, and a child with small sensitive fingers can find it difficult. Also cleaning, feeding and handling of the hedgehog is too much for a small child to be responsible for.

Health risks are minimal, but you should follow these tips. Always wash your hands before and after holding the hedgehog. Keep fingers away from the hedgehog's mouth. Hedgehogs rarely bite, but I would not take chances. Hedgehogs don't need routine vaccinations.

Is a hedgehog the right pet for you and your boys? Only you can answer that question. Are your boys rough? Hedgehogs need to be handled gently. Are your boys loud? Hedgehogs like calm, quiet environments. Hedgehogs are nervous critters, so if you are calm and quiet, then your hedgehogs will respond better by relaxing their quills, which makes them easier to handle. Do your boys like to be entertained? Hedgehogs often remain in a hide box all day and sometimes don't come out until very late, around 9 or 10 p.m. It does not mean you can't get them at anytime, but they will be sleeping.

If your boys are looking for cage entertainment, a cage full of mice will do the trick for far less money. Hedgehogs and their supplies can be pricey, so do your homework first so you won't make any mistakes, and you will have a wonderful family pet.

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