

UNDERSTANDING ZOOONOSIS

Tips to prevent illnesses that animals can spread to humans

The Big Picture

- There are hundreds of different zoonotic diseases that have been around for centuries.
- All pets have the ability to transmit disease to humans.
- Children, who tend to put objects in their mouths and don't always wash their hands effectively, are more frequently diagnosed with zoonotic diseases.
- Proper hygiene, especially thorough hand washing, can prevent many diseases from being transmitted to people.
- Bacteria and other zoonotic contaminants can come from multiple sources. Salmonella has been isolated from amphibians, reptiles and rodents. However, salmonella can also be contracted from eggs, poultry, beef, milk and vegetables.
- The joys and benefits of responsible pet ownership often outweigh risks associated with living with a pet.

Understanding Zoonosis

- This term applies to all diseases that can be passed from pets to humans.
- All pets have the potential of spreading zoonotic diseases.
- Some zoonotic bacteria, viruses and parasites can be normal inhabitants of your pet's digestive system and can be shed in fecal material. Human contact with fecal material can occur when handling your pet or their bedding, habitat, food dishes, water bottles or aquarium water.
- Some bacteria, viruses and parasites that are zoonotic do not cause disease in pets but can affect humans, so veterinary examinations and fecal testing are recommended to evaluate your pet's health.
- Fleas, ticks, mites and lice may also be transferred from your pet to other family members.

Who's at Risk?

- Infants, young children, pregnant women and the infirm or elderly are at greater risk of infection and should use extra caution when in contact with pets or pet habitats.
- Persons with a healthy immune system are at lower risk for developing zoonotic diseases.
- Questions regarding your health should be directed to your doctor.
- Questions regarding your pet's health should be directed to your veterinarian.

Preventing Zoonosis

- Pets should not be housed in kitchens.
- Pets should not be allowed onto food preparation areas.
- Pets should not be bathed in kitchen sinks.
- Outdoor hoses should be used to clean pet habitats, aquariums, food and water dishes.
- Always wash hands thoroughly after handling any pet, habitat or items within a habitat.
- An anti-bacterial hand sanitizer should be used if soap and water are unavailable.

Safety Recommendations

Pets and Children

- The relationship between pets and children is special and can create life long memories.
- Children should always be supervised around pets.
- Children should be supervised as they wash their hands after interacting with your pet or the habitat.
- Children should not be the primary caregivers for pets and should not be solely responsible for cleaning habitats or picking up after pets.
- Do not allow children to kiss pets or put pets into their mouths.
- Avoid contact with pet habitats if you have cuts or open sores on your hands.

Deworming Your Pets

- It is not uncommon for pets to have parasites, especially young puppies and kittens.
- Follow the advice of your veterinarian as it relates to testing and deworming your pets.
- Deworming medications come in a variety of styles and some are easily given at home as a monthly preventative.
- Internal and external parasites may or may not cause obvious signs of illness in your pet so if you notice diarrhea, decreased appetite or straining to pass stools, you should take your pet in for a veterinary exam.
- If your pet has fleas you will need to treat your pet, the interior of your home and your yard.

PET SAFETY TIPS

- Use caution when handling pets and remember they may bite or scratch (especially when stressed).
- ALL ANIMALS can potentially carry viral, bacterial, fungal, and parasitic diseases contagious to humans.
- Thoroughly wash your hands with warm, soapy water before and after contact with any pet or its habitat.