

Northwood Animal Hospital

What You Should Know About Zoonotic Diseases

A **zoonotic disease** is a disease you can get from your pet or any animal. The very young, the very old, the immunocompromised and pregnant women are more at risk. You may obtain additional information at www.cdc.gov/healthypets. You may also contact your human healthcare provider.

Diseases you can get from animal feces:

Roundworms (*Toxocara* species) are common intestinal parasites of dogs and cats. Transmission to people is caused by accidental ingestion of feces (small children most at risk). Contraction of this disease can affect internal organs and cause blindness. Prevention includes multiple deworming of all young animals, continuous parasite control in adults, semi-annual fecal exams and timely removal of feces from the house/yard. Teach children appropriate sanitary habits, like washing hands after playing with pet or playing outside.

Raccoon Roundworm (*Baylisascaris* species) are intestinal parasites commonly found in Raccoon feces, and are easily transmitted to humans; therefore it is advised that all people avoid contact with raccoons or their feces. This disease is very serious as it affects the neurological system, often causing seizures or sudden blindness. If left untreated, this condition can be fatal in humans.

Hookworms (*Ancylostoma* and *Uncinaria* species) are common intestinal parasites of dogs and cats. Eggs are passed in the feces of dogs and cats, develop into larvae in the soil, and then invade the skin of their next host (victim). Both humans and animals can be affected. Prevention includes multiple deworming of all young animals, on-going parasite control in adults, semi-annual fecal exams and daily removal of feces from the yard.

Tapeworms are common intestinal parasites of dogs and cats. They are contracted when a dog or cat ingests an infected flea. Very rarely, humans (especially children) can also contract them by ingesting fleas. A rare type of tapeworm called *echinococcus* can cause very serious conditions in humans. Although it is primarily found in foxes in North America, cats who are allowed to hunt can also contract this particular tapeworm. If possible, cats should be prevented from hunting or treated with a tapeworm dewormer once monthly.

Toxoplasmosis is a protozoan. Accidental ingestion of contaminated cat feces or eating undercooked meat are the primary sources of human infection. It can cause abortion or birth defects in women who are infected during pregnancy. Ideally, pregnant women should not clean litter boxes; however, cleaning the litter box daily and thoroughly washing hands afterward will effectively prevent transmission of the disease. All people should wear gloves when gardening or handling uncooked meat. Always eat fully cooked meat and thoroughly wash vegetables to prevent this disease.

Diseases you can get from casual contact with animals:

Ringworm is a fungus that is found on the skin. You can come into contact with it on an affected animal or directly from the soil. It causes itchy, crusty skin lesions on pets and people. Prevention includes a timely diagnosis and treatment of affected pets and intensive household cleaning.

Scabies (*sarcoptes*) is a mite that causes an extremely itchy skin rash on pets and people. Contact with an affected animal may allow mites to crawl onto people or another pet. Minimal handling of affected pets until successfully treated is the prevention.

Diseases you can get from an animal bite or scratch:

Cat Scratch Disease is caused by bacterium called *bartonella henselae* that is transmitted through a bite or scratch. Kittens and children are more commonly affected than adults. Prevent cat scratches and bites by discouraging aggressive play. Maintain flea control (since fleas are the vector by which organism is transmitted from cat to cat). Clean all scratches or bites immediately. Contact your human healthcare provider if you are concerned about a cat bite or scratch.

Rabies is a virus. It is fatal in pets and humans unless they are treated immediately after exposure, and is transmitted by a bite or scratch from affected mammals or from inhalation of bat guano (feces) in caves. All companion animals should be vaccinated at recommended intervals. Avoid contact with wildlife (especially bats, raccoons, foxes, coyotes, and unvaccinated stray dogs and cats), especially if showing abnormal behaviors.

Disease you can get from urine or standing water:

Leptospirosis is a bacterial infection that can be found in standing water, wetlands or urine from affected animals. It is carried by wildlife, including raccoons, foxes, and squirrels. Vaccinate at-risk dogs, control rodent populations, and minimize access to standing water and wildlife. Use caution if handling urine from sick dogs.

How can I protect myself and my family?

- _ Have your veterinarian perform a complete physical exam on your pet every 6 months, including a fecal check for parasites.
- _ Give all household pets a monthly broad spectrum parasite prevention as prescribed by your veterinarian (Heartgard, Interceptor, Sentinel (for dogs), and Revolution are all acceptable).
- _ Use flea and tick products regularly as directed by your veterinarian (Advantage, Frontline, etc.)
- _ Remove pet feces in a timely manner from the yard or litter box.
- _ Do not allow your pets to roam freely.
- _ Wash hands thoroughly after contact with animals or their feces.