



Everything You Need to Know About Zoonotic Diseases

What is a Zoonotic Disease?

A zoonotic disease is a disease that can be transmitted from animals to people.

Who is at risk for Zoonotic Diseases?

Any human in contact with an infected animal or a disease vector is at risk. A vector is a disease carrier (i.e. an insect or a rodent) that spreads the disease from an infected animal to an uninfected human or animal. Small children or infants, pregnant women, the elderly or immunocompromised people are at increased risk for zoonotic diseases.

What diseases are Zoonotic?

There are many diseases that are considered zoonotic. Consult with your veterinarian if you have any specific questions or concerns. Below are a few of the more common zoonotic diseases people can be exposed to by dogs and cats:

- ❖ **RABIES:** Rabies is almost always fatal to animals and humans. It is spread in the saliva of animals such as foxes, bats, raccoons, skunks, cattle, dogs, and cats. Rabies can cause seizures, aggression or depression, excess salivation, weakness, coma, and other neurologic signs. If your pet is bitten by a wild animal or if you are bitten by an animal of unknown rabies history, the health department and your veterinarian will help advise you what to do.
 - ✓ **PREVENTION:** The best way to prevent rabies is to make sure that your pet is vaccinated according to state guidelines. Also, do not approach or handle any wild animals, especially those exhibiting abnormal behavior.

- ❖ **INTESTINAL PARASITES:** Roundworms are the most common intestinal parasite of pets and the most likely to be transmitted to humans. In fact, there are 10,000 cases of blindness in humans each year from roundworms. Humans can accidentally ingest infective worm eggs that have been passed through their pet's feces and left in the environment. The eggs hatch in the human's intestinal tract and the immature worms travel to various tissues in the body (including the eyes and brain) causing serious infections. Hookworms can also be transmitted to humans by walking barefoot on soil that has been contaminated with canine fecal matter or by eating improperly washed vegetables. Hookworms can migrate through the skin of people and can cause actual intestinal infection in people.
 - ✓ **PREVENTION:** Keep your pet on year round Heartworm Prevention, as many of these products protect against intestinal parasites as well. Fleas carry tapeworms so also be sure to use a year round flea control product, such as Frontline Plus. It is important to perform 2 fecal exams yearly on your pet and to take part in a routine deworming protocol. Good hygiene should also be practiced by scooping the litter box or cleaning your yard regularly and by washing your hands after handling infected soil or cleaning up feces daily.

- ❖ **LEPTOSPIROSIS:** Leptospirosis is a contagious disease that causes liver and/or kidney failure that can be spread to dogs and humans. Leptospirosis is spread through the urine



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of infected animals such as: deer, squirrels, raccoons, mice, rats, and cows. Dogs and humans can be exposed to this infected urine and it can be absorbed through the skin and mucous membranes. Animals living in the suburbs or those that are exposed to contaminated water, such as streams or ponds, are at risk for Leptospirosis.

✓ **PREVENTION:** The best way to prevent Leptospirosis is by vaccinating your pet. You can also protect yourself by: avoiding swimming or wading in freshwater ponds and slowly moving streams (especially those located near farms); boiling or chemically treating pond or stream water before drinking or cooking with it; controlling rats and mice around the home; and wearing protective clothing (gloves, boots, long pants, and long-sleeved shirts) when working with wet soil or plants.

- ❖ **TOXOPLASMOSIS:** Toxoplasmosis is a protozoal infection that people most commonly get from eating undercooked meat or by ingesting infected soil while gardening. People can also get Toxoplasmosis from the feces of infected cats. There is a lot of concern associated with Toxoplasmosis and pregnancy because this infection, if it occurs in the early stages of pregnancy, can lead to devastating birth defects in the unborn baby.

✓ **PREVENTION:** Rest assured that you do not need to get rid of your cat if you are pregnant! Pregnant women can be kept safe by having another family member scoop the litter box or by wearing gloves while scooping the litter box. Toxoplasmosis can be prevented by wearing gloves while gardening, eating well cooked meat, and by practicing good hygiene by washing your hands after handling soil or feces. Children's play areas should be protected from dog and cat feces. Yards and litter boxes should be cleaned daily to help prevent Toxoplasmosis from becoming infectious in the environment.

- ❖ **FLEAS:** Fleas can carry and transmit several potential illnesses to humans including Rickettsiosis and Bartonellosis. Fleas can also serve as an intermediate host for tapeworms, which can infect both you and your pet.

✓ **PREVENTION:** The best way to prevent fleas is to use a product such as Frontline Plus or Revolution every month year round.

- ❖ **TICKS:** Ticks transmit a large number of diseases in North America including Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, Erlichiosis, and Tick Paralysis. While you cannot get any of these diseases directly from your pet, your pet may bring infected ticks into your home.

✓ **PREVENTION:** The best way to prevent ticks is to use a product such as Frontline Plus every month year round. Always make sure to check yourself and your pet for ticks after being outside.

While zoonotic diseases can be devastating, most of them are easily prevented if you use the proper caution. Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns and always remember:
AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION IS WORTH A POUND OF CURE!