



# ZOONOSIS AND YOUR NEW PET

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Zoonotic diseases are those infections that we may get from animals. Most of them are preventable with a little common sense and good hand washing!

The disease the probably comes to mind first is Rabies. Although we have not had a pet case of rabies in 30 years, because infection can be fatal, it ranks the top concern for most people. Rabies is spread by infected animals through their saliva when they have bitten someone. It is important to talk with your doctor and your local rabies authority so you and your pet can be safe—and by the way—if your dog is current on his shots, it won't be a problem.

The larger problem than the disease of Rabies is the bite itself. CDC reports about 4.5 million people are bitten by dogs yearly, with one-in-five needing medical care. Half of these are children, and 30,000 need reconstructive surgeries as a result. Teach your children basic safety tips around dogs and properly socialize your pet around them.

Many of the diseases that are zoonotic are spread by ticks and fleas. Blood-sucking vectors spread the disease from an infected animal to a new animal or human. This includes a number of diseases that have been in the recent news: Lyme disease, West Nile, Babesiosis, Ehrlichiosis or even the Plague. How are they prevented? They are prevented by keeping your pet free of ticks and fleas.

Other diseases are caused by internal parasites, worms that may be spread by unknowing hand-to-mouth contact with feces (poop). Some of the worms burrow through tissues looking for a host location, but cause damage as they move. Some cause no problem because we become dead-end hosts. If possible, have your pet's bathroom area be separate from where your children play. Clean up feces often, have your animal seen by a veterinarian yearly, and always wash your hands prior to eating.

Ringworm is not a worm at all, but a fungus the you could get by gardening. Young animals with immature immune systems may get it and pass it on to you. It with cause circular lesions that are raised and may be itchy. Basic fungal treatment, like you would use for athlete's foot, may take care of it—but generally seeing your doctor is best.

Parrots and other psittacine birds may carry chlamydia or salmonella. Wash your hands after handling the birds or cages, clean the cages regularly and do not house birds in bedrooms. Reptiles can also be a source of salmonellosis. Wash your hands after playing with them or cleaning their cages. Don't allow children to kiss or cuddle with reptiles.

All in all, visit your veterinarian regularly, have your children handle animals in your presence and encourage good hand washing!