

All of these types of pets may carry a bacterium called *Salmonella*. This bacterium causes Salmonellosis, which can cause severe vomiting, and diarrhea, and even death if untreated. The transmission of this bacterium can be greatly reduced if persons always wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling these pets. Their cages should not be kept or cleaned in kitchens or other food preparation areas.

Fish can also carry Mycobacterium species that can cause tuberculosis in cold-blooded animals. The fish may appear normal, or may have skin infections or many other kinds of symptoms including fin rot. There is some controversy over whether the Mycobacterium species that live in fresh water fish can cause local skin infections in humans. Those that are immuno-suppressed and young children should avoid handling fish and aquarium tank water without gloves.

Also of concern are mice or rats used as food sources for pet snakes. Wild rodents can carry lymphocytic choriomeningitis virus and infect pet rodents sold in pet stores or breeding facilities, as well as in the home. This virus can cause severe flu-like symptoms in humans.

Pocket Pets

A pocket pet refers to rats, mice, rabbits, gerbils, hamsters, guinea pigs and ferrets. These pets are usually kept in cages, but still may become infected with lymphocytic choriomeningitis virus if exposed to wild rodents. This disease can cause severe flu-like symptoms in humans. These pets may also carry *Salmonella* bacteria that can cause severe vomiting, diarrhea and even death in humans. Thoroughly washing your hands with running water and soap after handling pocket pets and cleaning their cages will greatly reduce your risk of infection.



Birds

Different types of birds can carry different diseases. For example, baby chicks and ducklings may carry the bacterium *Salmonella*. Parakeets and parrots, as well as wild birds, can carry the bacterium *Chlamydia psittaci*. This bacterium causes psittacosis in humans. The symptoms of this disease include severe pneumonia and even death. You can decrease the likelihood of contracting these diseases by wearing gloves when changing bird cages and cleaning the cages in well-ventilated areas. As for other zoonotic diseases, thorough hand washing with running water and soap is also important.



Important Points to Remember

Pets provide many health benefits for people

Always wash your hands thoroughly with running water and soap after contact with pets or their feces

Children and adults with compromised immune systems should take extra precautions

Immediately pick up puppy and kitten feces to avoid contaminating the environment in which children play

Ask your veterinarian if you have any questions or concerns about your pet's health



Special thanks to the Floyd County Animal Control and it's employees for providing children and animals.

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Answers to your health concerns in regards to the human and animal bond....

People and Pets: Tips for a Healthy and Happy Relationship



This educational material is created by Phoenix Central Laboratory, a veterinary diagnostic laboratory.

People and Pets: Tips for a Healthy and Happy Relationship

Pets provide many healthy benefits for people. Studies have shown that owning a pet can decrease your blood pressure, cholesterol and triglyceride levels, as well decreasing heart attack mortality by 3%. This translates into over 30,000 lives saved annually.

Pet owners also have better psychological well-being. This includes decreased feelings of loneliness and isolation. Children experience positive self-esteem by owning a pet and score significantly higher on empathy and prosocial orientation scales. Pets also provide opportunities for exercise and outdoor activities, as well as increasing opportunities for socialization. 70% of families surveyed reported an increase in family happiness and fun subsequent to pet acquisition.

Even though pets provide these many health benefits for people, some pets can transmit disease to people too. These diseases are called zoonoses. The information provided in this pamphlet will help you to enjoy your pets while keeping you and your family healthy. Although animals can transmit diseases to people, it is very unlikely that you would get sick from touching or owning a pet.

To best protect yourself from getting sick, wash your hands with running water and soap after contact with animals and their feces (stool).

Some people are more likely than others to get diseases from animals and need to be extra cautious. A person's age and health status may affect his or her immune system, increasing the chances of getting sick. These people include:

- Infants and children less than 5 years of age
- Elderly
- Pregnant women
- People undergoing cancer treatment
- People who have received organ transplants
- People with HIV/AIDS

Probably the most dangerous, but fortunately, the rarest zoonotic disease is rabies infection. This is caused by a virus and may be carried and transmitted by any mammal. Dogs and cats are routinely vaccinated against rabies virus to stop transmission of the disease from wild animals and to protect humans from transmission from their pets. Although uncommon in the Northwest, mammals can carry ticks infected with rickettsial diseases such as Ehrlichiosis and Lyme disease.

Dogs

Dogs can carry a variety of germs. Puppies in particular may transmit the bacterium *Campylobacter* in their feces. These bacteria can cause diarrhea in people.

Puppy feces can also carry eggs and larvae from roundworms and hookworms that, if accidentally ingested, may cause visceral or ocular larval migrans in people. These diseases can cause impaired vision or blindness as well as liver damage. Epidemiologic studies have shown that there is widespread contamination of soils with infective-stage larvae of these worms, and because of children's play habits, they are at an increased risk for exposure and infection. These risks can be markedly reduced by avoiding environmental contamination by immediately picking up feces from the yard and by emphasizing good hygiene and sanitation. Your veterinarian will recommend routine deworming and fecal examinations to help you prevent transmission.

Diseases that both dogs and humans can contract from the environment include *Giardia* and *Leptospirosis* infections. Humans usually contract these diseases from water sources contaminated by wild animals, however, rarely; dogs can be a source of infection through their feces or urine.

Dogs may also be affected by ringworm and sarcoptic



mange. These diseases present with hair loss and in the case of mange, intense itching. Humans may become infected by close contact with the hair coat of affected dogs.

Cats

Cats may carry diseases in their feces or through bites and scratches. Cat scratch disease (or cat scratch fever) is a bacterial disease caused by *Bartonella henselae*.

It is associated with cat bites or scratches. Some people appear to be more susceptible to infection with this organism than others. Its likelihood of transmission can be decreased by regularly trimming your cat's nails or using cat nail covers, such as Soft Paws®.

Another disease that can come from cats, but more commonly from gardening or eating raw meat, is Toxoplasmosis. This disease is caused by a parasitic organism that lives in the soil and may be contracted by cats which hunt and eat wild rodents. Physicians are particularly concerned about the transmission of this disease during pregnancy. Pregnant women should avoid direct contact with cat feces and soil. Kitten feces may also carry roundworm eggs and larvae, that if accidentally ingested may cause migrating larvae that can damage the eyes and liver.

Kittens and adult cats may carry ringworm fungus on their fur without being infected themselves. Humans with cuts or skin scrapes can become infected from close contact with these pets.



Fish, Amphibians and Reptiles

Fish, frogs, toads and the water they live in can carry bacteria that may cause illness in people. Turtles with shells smaller than 4 inches are of particular concern.