



# Common Questions about Zoonotic Diseases

Zoonotic diseases are infectious diseases (caused by bacteria and viruses) that can be spread between humans and animals. This factsheet addresses some common questions about zoonotic diseases. If you have questions about your health or the health of your pet, please contact your health care provider or veterinarian.

## **Can I give a cold to my pet?**

Millions of humans get sick from the common cold each year. Most of the viruses that cause common colds in humans do not make animals sick. Animals, including dogs and cats, can get diseases that cause similar symptoms, but they will not catch common colds from you.

## **Can my child get pinworms from our dog?**

Unlike some other intestinal parasites of animals, such as round worms and hookworms, people won't get infected with pinworms from animals. People with pinworms can only spread them to other people.

## **Can my dog give me strep throat?**

Group A *Streptococcus* are bacteria that cause strep throat in humans. The bacteria have been found in dogs and cats because of close contact with people. While older studies suggested a link between infected pets and pet owners, recent studies have not shown that pets are infecting their owners.

## **Can my house become infested with fleas even if I don't have a pet in my home?**

Dog and cat fleas can be brought into your home by pets, humans, or contaminated carpet. Adult fleas can survive for several weeks in your home without feeding, but need to eventually feed on blood in order to reproduce and multiply. Fleas prefer to eat and live on dogs, cat, and other animals, but will bite humans if they are hungry enough. In most homes, fleas will die within one to two weeks if they do not have animals to feed on.

## **Can I get AIDS from my FIV-infected cat?**

Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) and Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) cause similar effects in cats as the human diseases, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) have on people. However, FIV, FeLV, HIV and AIDS are caused by different viruses that do not spread between humans and cats.

## **Should I get rid of my cat because I'm pregnant?**

Some cats shed an intestinal parasite, called *Toxoplasma gondii*, in their feces which may cause miscarriages in pregnant women. If you are pregnant and own a cat there are simple measures you can take to reduce your risk of exposure. Do not adopt new cats or kittens while pregnant and don't handle stray cats. Also, keep your cat indoors and don't allow your cat to

eat raw or undercooked meat. Have someone else clean the litter box, if possible. If you can't find someone else to clean the litter box, wear rubber gloves and wash your hands thoroughly after cleaning it. It's important to clean out the litter box daily.

### **Should I get rid of my pet because my immune system is weakened due to disease or medication?**

Although animals can carry diseases that can make you sick, simple precautions can greatly lower your risk of catching these diseases. For instance, keep your animal healthy with frequent veterinary visits and wash your hands after handling your pet, especially before eating or preparing food. Work closely with your doctor and veterinarian to maintain your health and your pet's health.

### **Should I let my dog or cat drink water from the toilet?**

Animals may like to drink the cold water from your toilet bowl, but you should not encourage this behavior. Toilets may contain harmful chemicals (such as bleach) and germs that can infect humans and animals (such as *Campylobacter* and *Cryptosporidium*). Little scientific research exists on this subject, but keeping the toilet lid closed is probably easiest and safest for everyone.

### **Is my dog's mouth cleaner than mine?**

While no studies have been performed to specifically compare a dog's mouth with a person's mouth, research has shown that human and canine mouths contain hundreds of different kinds of bacteria. More importantly, many of these bacteria can make humans sick. Therefore, don't encourage animals to lick your face or open wounds, especially if your immune system is weakened due to disease or medication.

### **Can my pet give me MRSA?**

Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a bacterium that can affect humans and rarely, animals. People are more likely to get MRSA from other people and contaminated objects than from their pets.

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For More Information Visit:

American Veterinary Medical Association

[www.avma.org/default.asp](http://www.avma.org/default.asp)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Healthy Pets Healthy People

[www.cdc.gov/healthypets/](http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/)

Companion Animal Parasite Council

[www.capcvet.org/index.html](http://www.capcvet.org/index.html)

Iowa Department of Public Health Center for Acute Disease Epidemiology

[www.idph.state.ia.us/Cade/Default.aspx](http://www.idph.state.ia.us/Cade/Default.aspx)

Iowa State University Center for Food Security and Public Health

[www.cfsph.iastate.edu/?lang=en](http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/?lang=en)