



# **Safe Pet Guidelines**

***A Comprehensive Guide  
for Immunocompromised  
Animal Guardians***

# PETS ARE WONDERFUL!

Anyone who has ever lived with a companion animal knows that the unconditional love and acceptance we receive from them is unlike what we generally experience with our human relationships. This is especially important to us when our human contacts diminish through, for example, aging or isolation because of disease.

Animals can bring a unique sense of continuity, stability, and love to our lives; studies demonstrate that companion animals have a positive influence on the quality of life for the aging and ill. Please refer to the PAWS brochure *The Health Benefits of Companion Animals* for further information on this subject. However, if our immune system becomes suppressed through disease, age, or medical treatments, we become more vulnerable to infections, and may become fearful of contact with other living creatures, including our companion animals.

## What Are Zoonoses?

Zoonoses (pronounced ZO-uh-NO-seez) are diseases that humans can catch from animals. This brochure will review general guidelines for minimizing your risk of catching a disease from a companion animal. If you are immunocompromised and have an animal companion or want to adopt one, carefully review these guidelines with your physician and your animal's veterinarian.

## *Am I at risk for catching a disease from my pet?*

Current evidence supports the fact that pets pose a minimal health risk to their owners. An individual's risk may be slightly higher if he or she has a compromised immune system. This includes:

- > People with HIV/AIDS, especially if their CD4 count is low
- > People on chemotherapy or high doses of steroids
- > People who are aged
- > People born with congenital immune deficiencies
- > Pregnant women, and the children they carry
- > People who have received organ or bone marrow transplants
- > Children 5 years of age or younger

## Zoonoses and HIV/AIDS

While there are a number of diseases we can catch from animals, there are only rare instances when people with HIV or AIDS have caught infections from their pets. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also state that there is no evidence that dogs, cats, or any other non-primate animals can contract the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) or transmit it to people.

# A healthy pet is a safe pet

## General Guidelines For Your Animal

Follow these guidelines to help keep your pets healthy and as safe as possible. Keep in mind that a little preventive care can go a long way in maintaining your animal's health, and a healthy animal is less likely to pick up diseases and transmit them to you.

Having an appropriate healthy animal can provide companionship and health benefits. Zoonotic risk, although small, can be minimized by following good hygiene and the safe pet guidelines. If you have questions, always talk to your veterinarian and physician.

### DIET

- > Feed your pet a high quality commercial diet that is designed for your animal and his or her stage of life.
- > Don't feed your animal raw or undercooked meats or unpasteurized milk. Keep in mind that microwaving may not heat the meat sufficiently to kill organisms in it.
- > Prevent your animal from eating his or her own or another animal's or human feces.
- > Provide plenty of clean, fresh water. Don't let your animal drink from the toilet or standing water outside.
- > Prevent your animal from raiding the trash.
- > Prevent your animal from hunting or eating other animals.
- > Keep cats indoors so they can't catch diseases from mice, birds or other animals. If your cat does go outdoors, consider placing two bells on the collar to help warn potential prey.

### VETERINARY CARE

- > Have all new animals examined by a veterinarian.

- > Take your animals to the veterinarian for a check up at least once each year and whenever your animal develops diarrhea or becomes ill.
- > Keep your pet up to date on vaccines (shots). Consult with your veterinarian about the best protocol for your area.
- > Keep your pet free of worms and other parasites. Ask your veterinarian about the best testing and treatment protocol for your area.
- > With the guidance of your veterinarian, employ a strategic deworming program.
- > Have your cat (particularly a new cat or an outdoor cat) checked for the Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV), because while not transmittable to humans, these diseases suppress the cat's immune system, making him or her more susceptible to diseases which could be passed on to you.

### GROOMING/FLEA CONTROL

- > Have your animal bathed, brushed, and combed as needed to keep the skin and coat healthy.
- > Keep your animal's toenails trimmed to minimize the risk of your being scratched. If necessary, ask your vet about rubber caps that can be placed on your cat's nails as an alternative to declawing.
- > Use good flea control. Consult with your veterinarian about the best available products.
- > Have your pet examined if there is any hair loss.
- > A clean environment is important. Keep your pet's living and feeding areas clean. Wash your pet's bedding regularly.

# The benefits of animal ownership far outweigh the risks

## ADOPTING A NEW ANIMAL

Adopting a new animal companion is always exciting, but keep in mind new pets, especially puppies and kittens, present more of a risk. If you are going to adopt a new pet, an adult animal is safer. Consult with your veterinarian and physician before adopting a new animal. Your veterinarian may recommend some tests for parasites and other diseases on a new animal. It is best not to take a new animal into your home until you know that he or she is healthy.

## ANIMALS TO AVOID

Unfortunately, some animals simply present too much risk to immunosuppressed people and should be avoided altogether: stray animals, animals with diarrhea, reptiles (turtles, lizards, and snakes) and amphibians, "exotic" pets (such as potbellied pigs, sugar gliders and prairie dogs), other wild animals and some birds (including pigeons, baby chicks and ducklings), farm animals, and non-human primates (monkeys). Non-human primates carry the greatest risk because of their close genetic relationship to humans and should not be pets under any circumstances. It is also good to remember that the humans in the household pose many risks to the animal as well.

## FIRST AID FOR BITES/SCRATCHES

- > Rinse a bite wound or scratch right away with plenty of running water.
- > Wash the area with a mild soap or with a tamed iodine solution such as Betadine® solution that has been diluted with water.
- > Contact your physician.

## HYGIENE

- > Wash your hands frequently, especially before eating or smoking.
- > Avoid contact with your pet's bodily fluids such as vomit, feces, urine or saliva.
- > In the event of an accident, clean up the mess with a disinfectant (an ounce of bleach in a quart of water works nicely to kill many infectious organisms) then wash your hands thoroughly. Better yet, wear gloves, or have someone not at risk clean it up.
- > Don't let your pet lick a wound on your face or body.
- > Never walk barefoot or contact the soil where feces in the soil or sand is likely to be found.
- > Control rodent infestations.

*"Until one has loved an animal, a part of one's soul remains unawakened."*

*- Anatole France*



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## About Dogs

### *Can dog diseases make me sick?*

Most healthy dogs carry little or no health risk to people. Some dogs, particularly puppies, however, do carry some diseases that could be harmful to someone at higher risk. Parasites which dogs can transmit to people include roundworms, hookworms, *Cryptosporidium* and *Giardia*. In rare instances, dogs can also transmit bacteria such as *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*. These parasites and bacteria are most often associated with puppies or with adult dogs that live in unsanitary environments. Any new dog or any dog having diarrhea should have his or her stools tested for these infections by a veterinarian.

### *Can I reduce the risk of catching a disease from my dog?*

Yes. PAWS recommends that people at risk only get dogs older than nine months of age. Puppies are more likely to harbor infections than healthy adult dogs. Following the guidelines listed earlier will help to reduce your risk of catching any infections your dog may have.

### *My dog bit someone with AIDS. Can I get AIDS from my dog now?*

No. HIV is a very fragile virus and cannot be spread to animals. There is no risk of catching HIV or AIDS from a pet.

### *What could a person with a compromised immune system catch from a dog bite?*

The biggest concern with dog bites is the normal bacteria that is on one's own skin get pushed into deeper tissue, which could more easily cause a serious infection. Any wound that breaks the skin requires first aid and, if necessary, medical care. Please refer to the *General Guidelines* for steps to be taken.

***"My little dog – a heartbeat at my feet."***

*- Edith Wharton*



## About Cats

### *Can I reduce the risk of catching a disease from my cat?*

Yes. Most cats pose a minimal risk for transmitting a disease. Indoor cats have the lowest risk of carrying a disease that can spread to a person. Following the guidelines in this brochure will help you reduce your risk of contracting a disease from a cat. If you are at an increased risk, you should review these recommendations with your physician and your veterinarian.

### **CAT SCRATCH DISEASE & BACILLARY ANGIOMATOSIS**

#### *What is Cat Scratch Disease?*

Cat Scratch Disease (CSD) is a bacterial infection caused by *Bartonella henselae*. The infection usually causes fever, fatigue, and swollen lymph nodes. Most cat scratches do not develop into CSD.

#### *What is Bacillary Angiomatosis?*

*Bacillary Angiomatosis* (BA) is a rare complication of *B. henselae* infection, which usually occurs in people with HIV/AIDS. Patients with BA may have skin lesions which sometimes resemble *Kaposi's Sarcoma* (KS). BA can also affect internal organs such as the liver or spleen.

#### *What is Bartonella?*

Both CSD and BA appear to be caused by the same bacteria, *Bartonella henselae*. Human *Bartonella* diseases are the most common zoonotic disease in the U.S. today.

#### *How is my cat affected by this organism?*

Cats that carry the bacteria are generally not ill and show no signs of infection. Recent research shows that cats acquire the *Bartonella* organism from fleas.

#### *How is this organism transmitted to people?*

Cats may transmit *Bartonella* to people by scratches or possibly bites. Fleas may also be involved with transmission to people. Kittens are more likely to be associated with transmission of CSD or BA to humans than are adult cats.

#### *Should I have my cat tested?*

Although tests are available to determine if your cat has been exposed to *Bartonella*, testing is not recommended because test results can be confusing and wouldn't change recommendations.

#### *Is it treatable in people?*

It is extremely important to see a doctor if you think you may have BA. The condition is very treatable (and curable). CSD in people with healthy immune systems is usually benign. If you are concerned about CSD, consult your doctor. If you are scratched or bitten by a cat and develop a wound that will not heal, a fever, unusual skin lesions or are otherwise ill from unknown causes, you should let your doctor know that you were scratched or bitten.

### **Can I prevent myself from getting this disease?**

Following the *General Guidelines* at the beginning of this brochure will reduce your risk of getting CSD or BA from your cat.

### **How can I reduce my risk of cat scratch disease and other infections?**

- > Follow the *General Guidelines* listed earlier.
- > Minimize contact with kittens.
- > Wash your hands after handling a cat.
- > Wash all bites or scratches immediately with soap and water. If you are bitten contact your doctor.
- > Discourage your cat from scratching or biting you. Avoid rough play.
- > Keep your cat's nails trimmed short. If your cat tends to scratch frequently, talk to your veterinarian about behavior modification or nail caps for cats to help minimize scratches.
- > Don't allow a cat to lick open wounds on your body.

## **RINGWORM**

### **What is ringworm?**

Ringworm is not actually a worm. It is the common name for a group of fungal infections that affect the skin of a large variety of animals, including cats and people.

### **How will I know if my cat is carrying ringworm?**

Most cats with ringworm will lose hair and have crusty skin where the infection is. This can look very similar to many other skin conditions, so contact your veterinarian if you are concerned that your cat may have ringworm. Some cats, particularly certain purebred cats, can carry ringworm

without showing any symptoms. Ask your veterinarian if your cat may be at risk.

### **Can I catch ringworm from my cat?**

The rate of transmission is low, but anyone, including someone with a healthy immune system, can potentially contract ringworm from a cat (or other animal) that is carrying the disease.

### **What if I catch ringworm?**

Ringworm is treatable. Contact your doctor if you are concerned about possible exposure. There is no evidence that ringworm is more severe or more common in people with compromised immune systems.

## **TOXOPLASMOSIS**

### **What is toxoplasmosis?**

*Toxoplasmosis* is an infection caused by the single-celled parasite, *Toxoplasma gondii*. It can infect most mammals (including humans) and some birds.

### **Why are cats blamed for toxoplasmosis?**

Cats are the only species of animal to shed the infectious stage in their feces. Other animals, however, can disseminate *Toxoplasma gondii* if their infected meat is eaten without proper cooking. Humans most commonly contract *toxoplasmosis* by eating undercooked infected meat.

### **How do cats get toxoplasmosis?**

Cats acquire *toxoplasmosis* by eating rodents, undercooked meat, the feces of other cats, or contaminated soil. Cats can acquire the infection easily if they are allowed to hunt or are fed raw or undercooked meat; as many as 90% of cats are

# "I love cats because I enjoy my home; and

exposed to *Toxoplasma gondii* during their lives.

## **How will I know if my cat has toxoplasmosis?**

Most infected cats show no symptoms of the disease. Sometimes there is a short episode of diarrhea, pneumonia, or ongoing eye problems or problems of the nervous system. Healthy cats pass the infectious stage in their feces only during the first two weeks after they are exposed. After that time, the cat's immune system will usually prevent passing of the organism.

## **Should I test my cat for toxoplasmosis?**

No. Although a test is available to measure a cat's antibody response to *toxoplasmosis*, testing cats is not recommended because the test results would not change the recommendations.

## **How do I prevent my cat from getting it?**

To minimize your cat's chance of infection, follow the *General Guidelines* listed earlier.

## **Should I worry about getting toxoplasmosis from my cat?**

Humans will only rarely acquire toxoplasmosis from an infected cat. More commonly, people are exposed by eating undercooked meat and unwashed fruits or vegetables, congenitally (from an infected mother to her fetus through the placenta), or by accidental ingestion of contaminated soil when gardening. About 15-50% of the U.S. population (depending on where you live) has already been exposed.

## **What happens if I get toxoplasmosis?**

A healthy adult person is unlikely to get sick when exposed to *Toxoplasma gondii*; most commonly they will only exhibit mild flu-like symptoms. If you are pregnant, however, and if and only if it is your first exposure, infection can lead to birth defects and possible miscarriage. If you have a compromised immune system due to conditions such as HIV/AIDS or chemotherapy, *toxoplasmosis* can be life threatening, often leading to central nervous system disorders. Most cases of *toxoplasmosis* in immunocompromised people are due to a reactivation of a previous infection and not a new infection.

## **Should I be tested for exposure to toxoplasmosis?**

A test is available to determine if you have been exposed to *Toxoplasma gondii*. This test is currently recommended for all immunocompromised people. Consult your doctor if you are concerned.

If you have a compromised immune system:

1. If you test positive, your doctor may put you on therapy.
2. If you test negative, be sure to follow the *General Guidelines* listed earlier.

If you are pregnant:

1. If you test positive, you have built up antibodies to protect you and the fetus from a new infection.
2. If you test negative and you become infected with *Toxoplasma gondii* during your pregnancy, you risk having a baby with birth defects, so be sure to follow the *Safe Litter Box Guidelines* listed on page nine.



## How can I reduce my risk of contracting toxoplasmosis?

- > Use caution around the litter box (see *Safe Litter Box Guidelines* on page nine).
- > Cook all meats well (This means cooking to an internal meat temperature of 165°F). Microwaving may not always cook meat well enough.
- > Wash hands and food-preparation surfaces thoroughly after contacting raw meats.
- > Wash vegetables well.
- > When gardening, wear gloves and avoid touching your mouth (don't smoke or drink).

## PLAGUE

### What is plague?

Plague is a rare bacterial disease caused by the bacteria *Yersinia pestis*. It is found most commonly in the southwestern U.S. (for example, Colorado and New Mexico).

### Do cats carry the plague bacteria?

Yes, in very rare cases, cats do carry *Yersinia pestis*, but most often fleas living on rodents (mice and rats) are the source of infection for humans and cats.

### How do I keep my cat from catching plague?

Keep your cat indoors at all times and use good flea control measures in your home and on your cat. Eliminate rats or mice in your home.

### How would I know if my cat is infected with plague?

Cats typically will be very tired and have swollen lymph nodes and a fever. Sometimes they may also have lung problems.

### Can I catch plague from my cat?

Most human plague infections occur when the person is bitten by an infected flea from a mouse or rat. If your cat becomes infected, however, it is possible for you to also become infected from your cat.

### How do I protect myself from catching plague?

Don't handle or pickup dead animals from your home, work or recreation areas. Treat your pets with flea control products regularly.

### What happens if I get plague?

People usually show symptoms two to six days after being infected. The initial symptoms usually include: fever, chills, weakness, swollen and painful lymph nodes, headaches, and occasionally respiratory signs may also be present initially. Plague can be cured, so consult with your doctor if you feel you may have been exposed to plague.

## OTHER ZOO NOTIC DISEASES OF CATS

### What other diseases can I catch from contact with my cat's feces?

Cats can occasionally be the source for a variety of intestinal ailments including some bacterial infections (*Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*) and some intestinal parasites (*Giardia*, *Cryptosporidium*, hookworms, and roundworms.) These diseases can be spread to people by direct contact with the feces of an infected cat, or by contact with soil that has been contaminated by the feces of an infected cat. Many animals other than cats also can carry these infections. *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*

are most often spread through undercooked meat or improperly prepared food.

### ***How will I know if my cat is carrying one of these diseases?***

Cats that are carrying one of these infections will sometimes, but not always, have diarrhea. Cats at highest risk for one of these infections are stray cats, young kittens, cats recently adopted from an animal shelter, or cats that are immunocompromised themselves.

### ***What will happen if I catch one of these diseases?***

This group of bacterial and parasitic infections will usually produce only temporary symptoms in someone with a healthy immune system. For people who are immunocompromised, however, these infections can be life-threatening, often resulting in prolonged diarrhea.

### ***Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)***

Both of these viruses are different from the human AIDS virus (HIV). Both FeLV and FIV are contagious between cats, but neither of them can infect humans, nor can the human virus infect cats.

These diseases do, however, suppress the cat's immune system, making him or her more susceptible to diseases which could be passed on to you. If you are immunocompromised, it is best not to keep a cat with FeLV or FIV. If you do keep a cat with one of these diseases, be extra careful about following the *General Guidelines* listed earlier.

## **SAFE LITTER BOX GUIDELINES**

- > Keep the box away from the kitchen and eating areas.
- > If possible, have someone who is not at risk change the litter box. Otherwise, change the litter box daily using disposable gloves. It takes the *Toxoplasma* parasite at least 24 hours to become infectious.
- > Use disposable plastic liners and change them each time you change the litter.
- > Don't dump the litter! If inhaled, the dust could possibly infect you. Gently seal the plastic liner with a twist tie and place in a plastic garbage bag for disposal.
- > Disinfect the litter box at least once a month by filling it with boiling water and letting it stand for ten minutes. This will kill the *Toxoplasma* organism, which can normally persist in the environment. Do not use disinfectants like Lysol as it is toxic to young cats.
- > Always wash your hands with soap and warm water after cleaning the litter box, even if you wear gloves.

***"An animal's eyes have the power to speak a great language."***

*- Martin Buber*



**"A bird does not sing because it has an answer. It sings because it has a song."**

**- Chinese Proverb**

## About Birds

### **Can bird diseases make me sick?**

Most healthy pet birds pose little or no health risk to humans, but some bird diseases can cause illness in people. *Mycobacterium Avium Complex* (MAC), *psittacosis* (parrot fever), *cryptococcosis* (*Cryptococcus*) and *salmonellosis* (*Salmonella*) are the primary diseases associated with pet birds that can potentially transmit to humans. *Allergic alveolitis* can also develop in sensitive humans. Some birds can carry the intestinal parasite *Giardia*. It is unlikely that you will acquire an infection from your bird, but caution is always advised, especially for higher risk groups.

### **What are the chances that my bird has one of these infections?**

That depends on the species of bird, its source, age, and general health status. Newly adopted birds and birds undergoing other stresses are always more risky. A veterinarian experienced in avian medicine should be consulted to evaluate your particular situation.

### **How can I tell if my bird has an infection?**

There are no specific symptoms characteristic of each disease. If your bird stops eating, loses weight, has vomiting or diarrhea, appears fluffed up and chilled, or has any other behavioral change, then your bird should be seen by a veterinarian immediately.

### **How do I get these diseases from my bird?**

These diseases can be transmitted by

direct contact with stool and nasal discharge or by breathing dried, powdered droppings.

### **Can I acquire these diseases from sources other than my bird?**

Yes. In fact, it is much more common to acquire these diseases from the environment, undercooked or contaminated foods, or in some cases, from other people. Complete avoidance of all zoonoses is impossible.

### **What happens if I get any of these diseases?**

**MAC (*Mycobacterium Avium Complex*, also known as *Atypical Mycobacterium*, a disease similar to tuberculosis)** is most commonly acquired from the environment, can cause a variety of symptoms (including night sweats, weight loss, abdominal pain, fatigue, diarrhea and anemia) and is suspected to be involved with AIDS wasting syndrome. MAC is a lifelong infection that can be reactivated as the immune system deteriorates. There are now drugs that can help control human infections of MAC.

***Psittacosis* (parrot fever)** produces flu-like symptoms and is usually accompanied by a dry, nonproductive cough and fever. *Psittacosis* can be acquired multiple times. People catch this infection by breathing dried secretions from infected birds. To date, there are no reported cases of *psittacosis* in people with HIV/AIDS. Those at greatest risk are pet bird owners, pet shop employees, veterinarians and employees in poultry processing plants.

**Salmonella infections** cause fever and gastrointestinal symptoms including stomach cramps and diarrhea. Sometimes the symptoms are so severe that medical treatment is required. *Salmonella* infections can occur repeatedly and an infected person can become a chronic carrier without showing any symptoms.

**Cryptococcosis** is a fungal infection that rarely causes any signs of illness in healthy individuals, but for those that are immunocompromised, severe brain and spinal cord disease can occur. The disease is spread by breathing the droppings of wild birds including pigeons. Dogs and cats can also contract *cryptococcosis* from birds, but they cannot transmit it to humans. Those with compromised immune systems should avoid areas where wild birds congregate.

**Allergic alveolitis** produces coughing and difficulty breathing. *Allergic alveolitis* is a progressive respiratory disease and can be alleviated by total avoidance of bird dander, feathers and in some cases poultry products.

If you are diagnosed with any of these diseases, your doctor will outline a treatment plan. Once again, it is important to emphasize that the likelihood of acquiring these infections from your pet bird is quite low.

### **Are there other bird-associated illnesses?**

Yes, but the above five diseases are by far the most common. Good sanitation and keeping your bird healthy is the best prevention for most infectious diseases.

### **Can a pet bird catch bird flu?**

As of 2005, the H5N1 strain of avian influenza (often called bird flu) was found only in wild birds (especially wild ducks) and in farmed chickens. This virus is found mostly in Asia, although it is possible that it will eventually infect wild birds in the U.S. If bird flu comes to the U.S., the best way to protect your pet bird is to prevent him or her from coming in contact with any wild birds or their droppings. In general, it is a good idea for any person to avoid unnecessary contact with wild birds and farmed birds.

### **How do I prevent my bird from getting these diseases?**

- > Never expose your bird to other birds that have not been tested for psittacosis and quarantined for 45 days. It is especially important to avoid contact with pigeons and other wild birds.
- > Avoid situations in which your bird will have casual contact with other birds (such as going to the pet store for wing clips and nail trims). Ideally, birds should be cared for at home rather than in boarding facilities.
- > All sick birds should be seen by a veterinarian as soon as possible.

### **How can I prevent myself from getting these diseases?**

- > Good sanitation and hygiene. See *General Guidelines* listed earlier.
- > Clean your bird's cage liner daily.
- > If you are in a higher risk category, use a surgical mask when cleaning your bird's cage.
- > Wash your hands after contact with birds.

- > Avoid contact with wild birds, including pigeons.
- > Avoid farmed birds and baby ducklings or chicks.

#### **How can I adopt a safe bird?**

- > In accordance with the 1992 Wild Bird Conservation Act, PAWS recommends only buying birds from a reputable breeder. Even though importation of wild birds for the pet trade has been illegal in the United States since 1992, these illegally imported birds are commonly sold at flea markets and by street vendors for a much reduced price. Illegally imported birds have a higher risk for carrying infectious diseases.
- > Do not buy birds that have been housed with imported birds.
- > Avoid pet store birds and any bird that appears sick.
- > Always set up a post-adoption veterinary visit to have your bird examined and to get all of your questions answered.

#### **Should my bird be tested for any of these diseases?**

Since each situation is different, your veterinarian will be better able to make recommendations for your particular situation. In general, we do not recommend routine screening for MAC or *Salmonella* because even some birds carrying these diseases will have a negative test result. In general, all newly acquired birds in the parrot family should be tested for *psittacosis*, but it is important to keep in mind that no single test or combination thereof can definitively rule out *psittacosis* in any bird or human.

#### **How do I locate a veterinarian who has experience with birds?**

Contact your state or local veterinary medical association, or the Association for Avian Veterinarians (AAV) at PO Box 811720, Boca Raton, FL 33481, call 561.393.8901, or on the web at [www.aav.org](http://www.aav.org). AAV also publishes a great brochure on psittacosis.

## **About Aquarium Fish and Amphibians (frogs, toads and salamanders)**

#### **What disease can I catch from fish?**

Aquarium fish can occasionally be the source of infectious diseases. Mycobacterial infections (a type of tuberculosis) can be transmitted by aquarium fish and some skin infections can be spread by contact with infected aquarium water. People can catch *Salmonella* from contact with infected amphibians and aquarium water.

#### **What can I do to reduce my risk if I decide to keep aquarium fish or amphibians?**

Wear gloves when cleaning an aquarium or when handling fish or amphibians. Fish suspected of having mycobacterium or any fish showing unusual lumps should be removed from the tank, and the aquarium should be disinfected before new fish are introduced. Follow the *General Guidelines* listed earlier.

## About Reptiles

(snakes, turtles, and lizards, including iguanas)

### A word of caution about reptiles

**We do not recommend that people with compromised immune systems keep or handle reptiles.** *Salmonella* infection can be transmitted by almost any reptile. Many reptiles are carriers of *Salmonella* without showing any signs of illness. Because reptiles have a tendency to lie in or move through their own feces, these bacteria can be found anywhere (and everywhere) on the animal's body. Treating the reptile with antibiotics is not a reliable method to rid the animal of *Salmonella*, and is not recommended.

### What can I do to reduce my risk if I decide to keep a reptile in my home?

Use gloves and a face mask when handling or cleaning these animals or their habitat. Better yet, have someone not at risk do the cleaning. Never wash your reptile in your kitchen sink or bathtub. Thoroughly wash your hands after handling a reptile. Feed a reptile a commercial diet and avoid feeding raw meat and eggs to reduce your animal's risk of acquiring *Salmonella*. If possible, dead prey rather than live should be offered to your reptile.

## About Ferrets

Zoonoses transmitted by pet ferrets are rare. Intestinal parasites are common in young ferrets and can potentially be spread to people. PAWS does not recommend that people at risk come in contact with an immature ferret. Ferrets are also

susceptible to human influenza and can easily pass it back to the human. Following the *General Guidelines* will help to reduce your risk of acquiring any infections your ferret may have.

## About Horses

Zoonoses transmitted by horses are rare. Intestinal parasites and infections such as *Salmonella* can potentially be spread to people. PAWS does not recommend that people at risk come in contact with an immature horse, a horse with diarrhea, or areas where horses are raised. Most adult horses kept in a clean environment pose little or no risk for transmitting a disease.

## About Rabbits and Rodents

Zoonoses transmitted by pet rabbits and rodents (rats, mice, guinea pigs, hamsters, or gerbils) are rare. The most common problems usually stem from reactions to rabbit scratches, or infections from rabbit or rodent bites. The *Pasteurella* bacteria carried by most rabbits may infect scratches or bite wounds. Scratches and bite wounds should be immediately washed and disinfected. Some external parasites of the rabbit, including fur mites and ringworm (a type of fungal infection), may be transmitted to humans. *Tuleriemia* and rabbit hemorrhagic fever have occasionally been associated with humans also.

Guinea pigs, mice, and rats can occasionally be the source for a variety of intestinal ailments, including some bacterial infections (*Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*) and some intestinal parasites (*Giardia* or *Cryptosporidium*). These diseases can be

**ask no questions and they pass no criticisms.”**

**- George Elliot**

spread to people by direct contact with the feces of an infected animal or by contact with soil that has been contaminated by the feces of an infected animal. *Lymphocytic choriomeningitis* (LCMV) is a potentially serious disease humans can catch from infected mice and hamsters. Pet mice and hamsters contract LCMV from other animals in a pet store or from exposure to wild mice in your home.

### **How can I reduce the risk of catching a disease from my rabbit or rodent?**

Do not feed your animal raw eggs or raw meat. Be diligent about washing your hands after handling your animal. Use disposable gloves when cleaning your animal's cage, or better yet, have someone who is not at risk care for the animal. Follow the *General Guidelines* listed earlier. If you are adopting a new rabbit or rodent, be sure that the animal is healthy and has not recently been exposed to any ill rabbits or rodents.

## **About Rabies**

### **What is rabies?**

Rabies is a virus that can infect the brain of some animals, including dogs, cats, and ferrets. In rare situations, it can also infect people.

### **Can I get rabies from my pet?**

In the U.S., human rabies cases are usually picked up from bats, raccoons, skunks, foxes and coyotes—or from bites from dogs in other countries. It has been more than 30 years since someone caught rabies from a dog or cat in the U.S.

### **How can I protect my pet from catching rabies?**

Rabies vaccinations (rabies shots) are available for dogs, cats and ferrets to keep them from catching rabies. Ask your veterinarian about the best protocol for rabies vaccination. If possible, keep your cat indoors so that he or she will not come into contact with other animals that can carry rabies. If your dog or cat is bitten by a wild or stray animal, call your veterinarian.

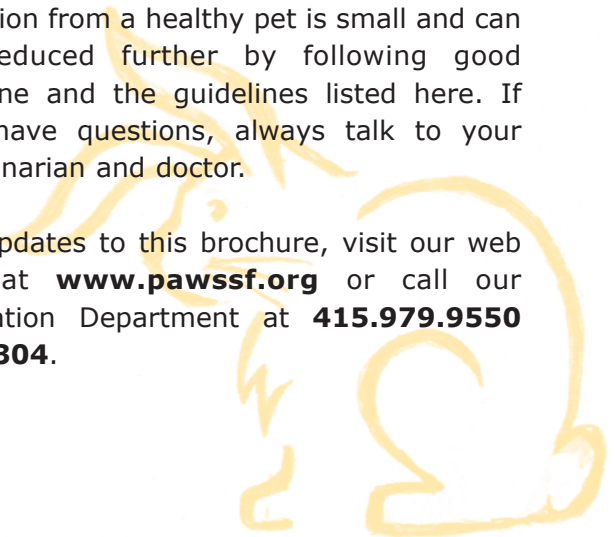
### **How can I protect myself from catching rabies?**

Prevent bats from entering your home, and if one does enter your home, call a professional service, or local city animal control, to have it removed. Consult with your doctor right away if you are ever bitten by any animal or have had a bat in your home. Many bat bites go unnoticed because the wound is small and painless.

## **Remember**

Having an appropriate healthy animal companion can provide companionship and health benefits. The risk of picking up an infection from a healthy pet is small and can be reduced further by following good hygiene and the guidelines listed here. If you have questions, always talk to your veterinarian and doctor.

For updates to this brochure, visit our web site at **www.pawssf.org** or call our Education Department at **415.979.9550 ext. 304**.



# CONTACTS

*If I have further questions who can I contact?*

Pets Are Wonderful Support  
645 Harrison Street, Suite 100  
San Francisco, CA 94107  
[www.pawssf.org](http://www.pawssf.org)  
Phone: 415.979.9550  
Email: [info@pawssf.org](mailto:info@pawssf.org)

Additional information on specific zoonotic diseases can be found at National Center for Infectious Diseases: Health Pets Healthy People at:

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

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645 Harrison Street Suite 100  
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## **CREDITS**

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Original Contributors: *Vic Spain, DVM; Karen Blount, DVM; Fred Angulo, DVM; Ken Gorczyca, DVM; James M. Harris, DVM; Alan Stewart, DVM.*

2006 Contributors: *Gail Hansen, DVM, MPH; Patricia Payne, DVM, Ph.D; Chip Wells, DVM; Stephanie Wong, DVM, MPH; Dr Heather Bair-Brake; Kathy Gervais, DVM; Ken Gorczyca, DVM; Vic Spain, DVM; James Carpenter, DVM, DAZM, Michelle Hawkins, DVM, DAZM, Joshua Freng, DVM.*

Edited by Andrea Brooks  
Design by Monica Ware

*Pets Are Wonderful Support (PAWS) is a volunteer-based organization that provides for the comprehensive needs of companion animals for low-income persons with HIV/AIDS and other disabling illnesses. By providing these essential support services, educating the larger community on the benefits of the human-animal bond, and advocating for the rights of disabled individuals to keep service animals, PAWS improves the health and well-being of disabled individuals and the animals in their lives.*

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