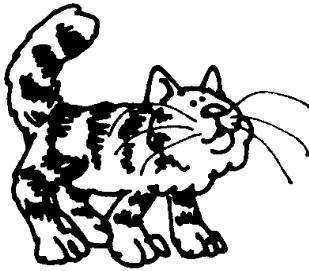


Questions you may have about **YOUR CAT AND YOUR HEALTH**



Provided in cooperation with **The Humane Society of the United States**

This brochure will review some of the common health concerns that arise for people who have cats as companion animals. For more information on other companion animals or for more general information, see the **Safe Pet Guidelines** published by PAWS.



Zoonoses: No, it's not what you find on the faces of elephants. Zoonoses (pronounced ZO-uh-NO-seez) refers to those diseases that humans can contract from other animals.

Until recently, zoonotic diseases touched few lives in this country.

Am I at risk for contracting a disease from my cat?

Current evidence supports the fact that pets pose a minimal risk. Cats kept indoors are exposed to fewer diseases. Your risk may be slightly higher if you fall into one of the following groups:

- People with compromised immune systems
- People with AIDS/HIV
- People on chemotherapy
- People who are elderly
- People born with congenital immune deficiencies
- Pregnant women (a fetus's immune system is not fully developed)
- People who have received organ or bone marrow transplants

Can I reduce the risk of contracting a disease from my cat?

Yes. The recommendations 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.

**For more information, contact:
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Safe Litter Box Guidelines for People with Compromised Immune Systems

- **Keep the litter box away from the kitchen and eating areas.**
- **If possible, have someone who's not at risk change the litter box. Otherwise, change the litter box daily. 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! 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 five minutes. This will kill the *Toxoplasma* organism.**
- **Wear disposable gloves for extra protection, and always wash your hands after cleaning the litter box.**

THE BENEFITS OF ANIMAL COMPANIONSHIP OUTWEIGH THE RISKS!

Other Zoonotic Diseases of Cats

Are there other diseases I can contract 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*, 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. All newly acquired cats are at a higher risk and should have their feces tested by a veterinarian as soon as possible.

What will happen if I contract one of these diseases?

This group of bacterial and parasitic infections will usually only produce 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.

How can I prevent my cat from getting bacterial infections and intestinal parasites?

- Feed your cat a commercial brand cat food.
- If you must feed your cat meat, poultry, or eggs, cook them well.
- Wash hands thoroughly after handling raw meat.
- Keep your cat indoors and prevent it from hunting.
- See Safe Litter Box Guidelines on page 1.

About Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)

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 infections which could be passed on to you. If you are immunocompromised, it is probably not best 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. Keep your cat indoors to prevent your cat from getting FeLV or FIV.

Pets Are Wonderful Support is a volunteer, non-profit group that helps improve the quality of life for persons with HIV disease, by offering them emotional and practical support in keeping the love and companionship of their pets, and by providing information on the benefits and risks of animal companionship.

We welcome donations to help us distribute our publications. The suggested donation for each brochure is \$1.00. If you are interested in obtaining multiple copies of any of our brochures, please contact our office:

Pets Are Wonderful Support, Education Department
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Please contact us for information on similar programs in your area.

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A healthy pet is a safe pet.

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* if their infected meat is eaten without proper cooking.

How do cats acquire 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 exposed to *Toxoplasma* in 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 neurologic or eye problems. Healthy cats only pass the infectious stage 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 usually not necessary 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, don't feed your cat undercooked meat, prevent your cat from hunting, and keep your cat indoors.

Should I worry about getting Toxoplasmosis from my cat?

Humans will only rarely acquire Toxoplasmosis from an infected cat. More commonly, people are exposed through ingestion of undercooked meats, unwashed fruits or vegetables, congenitally (from an infected mother to her fetus through the placenta), or by accidental ingestion of 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 human is unlikely to show symptoms when exposed to *Toxoplasma*. 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 AIDS/HIV 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 someone has been exposed to *Toxoplasma*. This test is currently recommended for all immunocompromised people. Consult your physician if you are concerned.

If you have a compromised immune system:

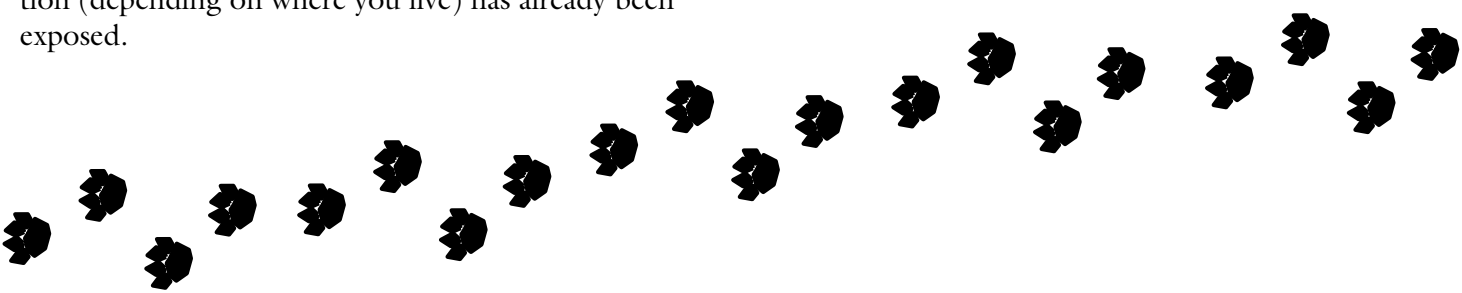
If you test positive, your physician may put you on therapy. If you test negative, be sure to follow the Prevention guidelines below.

If you are pregnant:

If you test positive, you have built up antibodies to protect you and the fetus from a new infection. If you test negative and you become infected with *Toxoplasma* during your pregnancy, you risk having a baby with birth defects, so be sure to follow the Prevention guidelines below.

Prevention

- 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.
- Wear gloves while gardening.
- Keep your cat healthy (keep it indoors and prevent hunting).
- Use caution around the litter box (see Safe Litter Box Guidelines on page 1).



Cat Scratch Disease and Bacillary Angiomatosis

What is Cat Scratch Disease?

Cat Scratch Disease (CSD) is a bacterial infection which usually causes fever, fatigue, and swollen lymph nodes. CSD is not the same as a cat scratch. Most cat scratches do not develop into CSD or Bacillary Angiomatosis.

What is Bacillary Angiomatosis?

Bacillary Angiomatosis (BA) is a rare condition which usually occurs in people with HIV/AIDS. Patients with BA may have skin lesions which sometimes resemble Kaposi's Sarcoma. 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*.

How is my cat affected by this organism?

Cats that carry the agent 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. Cats less than one year of age are more likely to be associated with transmission of CSD or BA 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 usually not necessary and interpretation of test results can be controversial.

Is it treatable in people?

It is extremely important for any individual who thinks he or she may have BA to see a physician. 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 physician.

How do I prevent myself from getting this disease?

- Wash your hands after handling a cat.
- Discourage your cat from scratching or biting you.
- Rough play should be avoided.
- Keep your cat's nails trimmed short. If your cat tends to scratch frequently, talk to your veterinarian about behavior modification or nail caps to help minimize scratches.
- Wash all bites or scratches immediately with soap and water.
- Cats should not be allowed to lick open wounds on your body.
- Minimize contact with kittens.
- Use good flea control on your pet and in your home.
- Contact your veterinarian or groomer for more details.

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 physician know that you were scratched or bitten.

Ringworm

Can I contract Ringworm from my cat?

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.

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.

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.

Ringworm is treatable. Contact a physician 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.

