

- Keep pets' nails trimmed to help prevent scratches, and consider behavior training for pets with a tendency to bite or mouth people.
- Be aware of settings where you and any children may be at higher risk of exposure to zoonotic diseases. These include farms, petting zoos and other animal exhibits, and travel destinations where specific diseases are more common (such as tropical regions).
- Prevent bug bites by using insect repellent when outdoors, and by keeping your yard free of brush, debris, and standing water.
- Keep sick animals away from people and other animals.
- Clean up after your animal(s), and keep their and your environments free of animal waste.
- Keep yourself and your animal(s) away from stray or wild animals and their carcasses.
- Avoid eating or feeding animals raw or undercooked meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs. Practice good hand hygiene after handling or working with these foods.
- Thoroughly wash fruits and vegetables.

A WORD ABOUT REVERSE ZOOONOTIC DISEASES

Reverse zoonotic diseases are said to occur when an infected person spreads a disease to an animal. This type of transmission is uncommon, but it does happen. Examples include methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), influenza A type H1N1, and SARS-CoV-2 infection. Fortunately, many of the same tips for protecting people from these diseases also apply to protecting animals.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW TO KEEP YOUR PET HAPPY AND HEALTHY AS LONG AS POSSIBLE, VISIT:

American Veterinary Medical Association
avma.org/PetOwners

PREVENTING ZOOONOTIC DISEASES

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Animals enrich our lives in many ways, and our interactions with them bring many benefits. However, these interactions also can pose risks to us both. One of these risks is the potential spread of disease.

The good news is that simple preventive measures like good hygiene can help protect everyone involved.

WHAT ARE ZONOTIC DISEASES?

Zoonotic diseases are infectious diseases that can be spread between animals and people. They are caused by a variety of organisms, such as certain viruses, bacteria, parasites, and fungi. Common examples of zoonotic diseases include rabies, leptospirosis, giardiasis, and ringworm, to name a few. The list also includes emerging diseases like avian influenza type A (H5N1), SARS-CoV-2, and mpox.

HOW ARE ZONOTIC DISEASES SPREAD?

Zoonotic diseases can be spread through various routes. These are the most common ones:

Direct contact

This includes being bitten or scratched by an infected animal, touching or handling them, and coming into contact with their feces (poop), urine, saliva, blood, or other body fluids. Animals often can look healthy while still harboring a zoonotic disease. Rabies, cat-scratch disease (bartonellosis), and ringworm are examples of diseases spread through direct contact.

Contact with contaminated objects and surfaces

Cages or stalls, bedding, food or water dishes, farm equipment, and even soil—many objects and surfaces can

Good hygiene and other preventive measures reduce the risk of zoonotic disease.

become contaminated and serve as a source of infection for people and animals. Examples of diseases that can spread in this way include toxoplasmosis, parrot fever (psittacosis), and anthrax.

Insect bites

Insects that have fed on infected individuals—like ticks, mosquitoes, and fleas—can be sources of infection for other people and animals. West Nile virus, Lyme disease, and plague are just a few zoonotic diseases spread through insect bites.

Food

Undercooked or raw meat and eggs, unpasteurized milk, and other food products from infected animals can be sources that spread zoonotic disease, as can contaminated raw fruits, vegetables, and other foods. A few key organisms in foodborne illness are *Salmonella*, *E. coli*, *Listeria*, and *Campylobacter*.

Water

Any water source that's exposed to animals and their waste is vulnerable to contamination with zoonotic organisms. This includes everything from ponds and streams to swimming pools and floodwater. People and animals can become infected by drinking or contacting contaminated water (as may occur when swimming). Common waterborne illnesses are giardiasis, leptospirosis, and cryptosporidiosis.

ARE CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS AT HIGHER RISK THAN OTHERS?

Children are at higher risk of zoonotic infections for several reasons: they are less likely to wash their hands after handling animals, their immune systems may not yet be fully functioning, and they are more likely to put their hands and other objects in their mouths. Other people may have a higher risk of infection because of their jobs (such as working with or caring for animals) or behaviors (such as hunting or traveling to a high-risk area).

When it comes to the potential for severe illness or complications from infection, higher-risk groups—for both people and animals—include the very young, the elderly, pregnant females, and those with a weakened immune system due to a health condition or treatment with immune-suppressing medications.

If you or your loved ones fall into any of these groups, take extra precautions to protect yourself.



HOW CAN ZONOTIC DISEASES BE PREVENTED?

Remember: Animals can look perfectly healthy while still carrying a zoonotic disease. Simple preventive measures like these can help protect you, your family, your animals, and others:

- Practice good hand hygiene. This means thoroughly washing your hands with soap and running water after all interactions with animals and their environments, even if you didn't touch the animals and even if they seem healthy.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth during these interactions until after you've washed your hands.
- Keep animals from licking you.
- Keep your animal(s) as healthy as possible through regular veterinary checkups, vaccination, and parasite control.