

Zoonotic Diseases of Dogs and Cats

Dogs and cats can carry several pathogens (parasites, fungus, bacteria, viruses) that can be spread to humans. Many of these diseases are familiar to pet owners (e.g., salmonellosis, rabies), while others are less well-known. Below are some of the relatively common zoonotic pathogens of dogs and cats.

Bacterial Diseases

Salmonellosis (dogs and cats): caused by the bacterium *Salmonella* and found in the intestinal tract of many animals. Infection may result from hand-to-mouth contact after directly handling animals, as well as after indirect contact through cleaning cages or bedding, handling food or food bowls, or other items in the area where the animal lives.

Campylobacteriosis (dogs and cats): *Campylobacter* bacteria infect the gastrointestinal tract of animals and humans, sometimes causing diarrhea. This infection can be spread to humans through fecal contamination from household pets.

MRSA (dogs and cats): a human disease sometimes spread to pets and then “given” back to the owner. Pets can be short-term carriers but generally are not the source of this illness.

Brucellosis (dogs): a disease found in dogs caused by the bacterium *Brucella canis*. Infected dogs can spread the disease to people and other dogs. While infection from a family pet is possible, dog breeders and veterinarians involved with birthing (whelping) puppies may be at higher risk.

Cat Scratch Disease (cats): caused by *Bartonella henselae* bacteria. Most commonly found in children after a scratch or bite from a cat. Infection appears at the bite or scratch site in about 1-2 weeks; lymph nodes may become swollen and tender.

Parasites

Giardiasis (dogs and cats): an intestinal infection caused by a protozoan parasite. The type of *Giardia* that infects humans is usually not the same type that infects dogs and cats.

Toxoplasmosis (cats): caused by a protozoan parasite (*Toxoplasma gondii*), generally spread through improper handling of raw meat or contact with cat feces. Toxoplasmosis can result in serious illness in people with weakened immune systems and in the fetus when a woman is infected during pregnancy or shortly before becoming pregnant.

Toxocariasis (dogs and cats): a parasitic disease caused by ingesting eggs of dog or cat roundworms. Human infection occurs through contact with environments contaminated with dog and/or cat feces (playgrounds, sand boxes).

Rabies Virus

In the U.S., rabies is carried by wild animals, primarily bats, raccoons, foxes and skunks. Unvaccinated family pets are susceptible if bitten or scratched by an infected animal. Vaccination of dogs and cats is effective in preventing rabies in companion animals.

Ringworm

A broad term for a group of fungal diseases of the skin. Some diseases infect only humans, others are limited to animals, but some may be shared between people, dogs, cats and other animals. Kittens infected with *Microsporum canis* are highly contagious, often causing infections in multiple household members. In such cases, a coordinated plan between the veterinarian and healthcare provider is needed to treat the disease and disinfect the household.

For more information on giardiasis, toxoplasmosis, ringworm and other zoonotic diseases, consult Pet Advocacy Network’s Zoonotic Disease Prevention resources and <http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/index.html>

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