

Where to find more information about pet ownership and zoonotic diseases:

Canadian Veterinary Medical Association  
www.animalhealthcare.ca  
Health Canada  
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/hiv\_aids/  
can\_strat/carre\_treat/index.html  
- Guides for People Living with HIV/AIDS  
Canadian Public Health Association  
www.clearinghouse.cpha.ca  
- Canadian HIV/AIDS Clearinghouse  
BC Ministry of Health  
- www.hlth.gov.bc.ca/hlthfile/  
Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)  
www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs  
/guidelines.htm,  
/brochure.htm



Saskatchewan Veterinary  
Medical Association

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Talk to your veterinarian about the benefits  
and potential risks of pet ownership for  
people with compromised immune systems.

## Pet Ownership and Zoonotic Diseases



Veterinarians answer  
important questions about  
the benefits and potential  
risks of pet ownership.

*Pet-associated organisms that  
pose a risk to people:*

<u>Bacteria</u>	<u>Parasites</u>
<i>Campylobacter</i>	<i>Cryptosporidium</i>
<i>Salmonella</i>	<i>Giardia</i>
<i>Leptospira</i>	<i>Toxoplasma</i>
<i>Bordetella</i>	<i>Roundworms</i>
<i>Chlamydia</i>	<i>Tapeworms</i>
<i>Mycobacterium</i>	
<i>Bartonella (Cat Scratch Disease)</i>	

<u>Viruses</u>	<u>Fungi</u>
<i>Rabies</i>	<i>Cryptococcus</i>
	<i>Histoplasma</i>

## The Human-Animal Bond and The Benefits of Pet Ownership

Pet ownership is associated with emotional and health benefits for people. The bond between humans and animals has been recognized for many years and the therapeutic value of pets has been documented. Pets offer dependable and unconditional love.



## Risks associated with pet ownership

However, pet ownership is not without health risks, especially for immuno-compromised people. Pets can carry and transmit agents that cause zoonotic infections; that is, infections that are shared by people and animals. People with weak or compromised immune systems are more susceptible to these types of opportunistic infections.

## How your veterinarian can help

Your veterinarian is an excellent source of information on diagnostic and preventive measures that are available to minimize the risk of zoonotic infections from pets.

Your veterinarian can provide  
valuable information about how to  
keep your pet healthy and minimize  
the risks of pet ownership.

## Depressed Immune Systems

- ◆ While all pet owners should find the advice in this brochure of interest, people at increased risk of opportunistic infections should try to follow these recommendations to minimize their chance of infection.
- ◆ A person may be immune compromised if their immune system is depressed.
- ◆ This can occur in:
  - the very young
  - the elderly
  - cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy or radiation therapy
  - people who have had their spleen removed
  - transplant recipients who are on anti-rejection drugs
  - patients with immune-mediated diseases (such as SLE/lupus) who are on immunosuppressive drugs
  - people infected with HIV or affected by AIDS
  - diabetics
  - pregnant women
- ◆ If you or anyone in your family or household is or may be immuno-compromised, please do not hesitate to discuss the situation with your veterinarian.

Please be assured that, as a health professional, your veterinarian will maintain doctor-client confidentiality.

## Caring for Pets of Immunocompromised People

By educating pet owners and monitoring the health of companion animals,

veterinarians can help reduce the likelihood of an immunocompromised person being affected by certain opportunistic zoonotic infections.

Your veterinarian can help you make individually appropriate, informed decisions about the risks and benefits of owning a pet.

### How can my veterinarian help me live with my pet?

Your veterinarian can provide an expanded preventive health care program for pets who live with immunocompromised people.

You will want to select a veterinarian who is willing to discuss safe practices for you and your pet. To help both you and your pet, your veterinarian may test for parasites and bacterial, viral, fungal and protozoan infections that could harm an immunocompromised person.

Your pet's health program needs to match your level of immunosuppression.



## Veterinary Care

Your veterinarian will recommend a testing and vaccination program designed for you and your pet. Your pet should be surgically neutered. This should make your pet less likely to roam.

You should seek veterinary care for sick pets immediately, especially when a pet has diarrhea. Fleas, ticks and internal parasites (worms) should be controlled.



## Pet Care

Keep your pet clean and well-groomed. Toenails should be kept short and blunt.

Walk your pet on a leash. Minimize your pet's contact with other animals, especially animals that you are not familiar with.

Prevent hunting and scavenging for food. Don't allow your pet to drink from dirty water sources, including the toilet bowl.

Keep your pet's living and feeding areas clean. It is recommended that you feed commercially prepared pet foods. Don't feed raw meat, poultry or dairy products to your pet.

Wear gloves and use disposable litterbox liners to change your cat's litter everyday. Ideally, you should have an immune competent person do this for you.



## What should I look for in a new pet?

New pets should be selected with care. Before any new pet is brought into your household, it should be examined by your veterinarian. Your veterinarian may want to run some screening tests and may want to treat for parasites.

New pets present a risk because they may come to you with little or no health history. You should be especially cautious about puppies, kittens and reptiles, who are more likely to carry infections. It is best to avoid any stray, exotic, and wild animals, including monkeys and reptiles (turtles, snakes, iguanas). It is also best to avoid all sick animals, especially those with diarrhea.

## Pet Selection

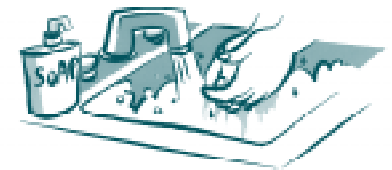
For you and your pet's sake, select a pet whose temperament, energy level and exercise requirements match your abilities.

It is also important to have someone who can, at a moment's notice, help care for your pet. Establish a way to notify this person in case of emergency.

## Additional Guidelines and Precautions

Don't allow your pet to lick your face or any cuts or scratches.

Wash your hands after petting or handling your pet, especially before eating.



If you are scratched or bitten, wash the wound thoroughly with soap and water and apply an antiseptic. Contact a physician immediately and know your pet's vaccination status.

Avoid or minimize contact with your pet's bodily fluids such as vomit, feces and other discharges. Wear rubber gloves to clean soiled areas and wash your hands after clean-up.

Use extra care when handling animals less than six months of age, especially if they have diarrhea or skin problems.

If you follow and practice safe pet guidelines, the benefits of pet ownership may far outweigh the risks of zoonotic infections.