



Protect Pets, Protect Yourself

Americans have 73 million dogs and 90 million cats as pets. While pets provide many health benefits for people, some animals can transmit diseases to humans.

Some may wonder how the H5N1 avian flu virus circulating in birds overseas may affect them and their pets. As of January 2007, the lethal H5N1 virus had not been detected in birds in the United States. There have also been no known cases anywhere of people contracting the H5N1 virus from animals other than water fowl and poultry. However, practicing healthy habits when handling pets will help protect people from other diseases carried by animals.

Some people are more likely than others to get diseases from animals and need to be extra cautious. A person's age and health status may affect his or her immune system, possibly increasing the chances of getting sick. These people include:

- Elderly.
- Pregnant women.
- People on immunocompromizing drugs for cancer, arthritis or organ transplant recipients.
- People with HIV/AIDS.
- Infants and children less than 5 years old (because of the tendency to put their hands in their mouths and often poor hand washing skills).

Different types of animals can carry different diseases. Some animals may be more likely than others to carry diseases that make people sick. Wild animals such as raccoons, bats, fox and skunks should be avoided by everyone. If you are in one of the groups outlined above, you should also avoid contact with:

- Reptiles (turtles, lizards and snakes).
- Baby chicks and ducklings.
- Puppies and kittens less than 6 months old.
- Any animal that appears to be ill.
- Be extra cautious around farm animals including those at petting zoos and petting farms.

To prevent illness due to animal contact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the following for all people, but especially for those at greatest risk of getting sick from pets:

- Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and running water after contact with animals or their feces.
- Avoid rough play with cats and dogs to prevent scratches and bites.
- If you are at higher risk of getting sick from animals, you should avoid contact with reptiles, baby chicks, ducklings, puppies and kittens. You should also be extra cautious around young calves and other farm animals.

Protecting pets from illness will help protect people too. Take the following precautions to keep your pets healthy:

- Pick up and dispose of pet droppings right away; clean litter boxes regularly.
- Wash animal blankets with soap or detergent regularly.
- Keep your dogs, cats and ferrets vaccinated against rabies and get your pet early, regular and life-long veterinary care.
- Exercise pets regularly, but don't let them roam unsupervised.
- Keep cats indoors.

GET INFORMED

To see what the State of Ohio is doing to prepare for a pandemic visit <http://www.ohiopandemicflu.gov>. This inter-agency Web site includes many resources for Ohioans:

- Planning resources for Ohio's families, schools, businesses, communities, health care providers and local governments.
- Fact sheets, questions and answers, multi-media files, brochures and more.
- Quarterly planning newsletters – subscribe here.

For more information on national pandemic flu planning, visit the U.S. Health and Human Services Web site <http://www.pandemicflu.gov>. This Web site includes some of the following resources:

- Planning checklists.
- Family emergency health information sheet.
- Emergency contacts form.
- Strategies to mitigate pandemics.

The World Health Organization Web site <http://www.who.int/en/> provides updates on avian influenza around the world in several languages. Other resources include:

- Advice for travelers.
- Frequently asked questions.
- Industry guidelines.

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