

Preventing Infections From Pets



Adapted from materials provided by the
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

In recent years, it's become accepted that pets can be beneficial to people living with HIV. Throughout the United States, there have been reports of improved emotional outlook and health stability among people with HIV who have contact with animals.

People living with HIV often deal with feelings of isolation, rejection, and lack of purpose. If this sounds like you, companion animals may offer purpose. But, while owning pets may provide rewards, there are still potential health risks to think about. It's important to learn about the risks and ways to prevent problems that may come when you own pets.

SHOULD I KEEP MY PETS?

Yes. Most people with HIV can and should keep their pets. Pets can help you feel psychologically and even physically better. For many people, pets are more than just animals—they are like members of the family. However, your decision to own or care for pets should be based on knowing what you need to do to protect yourself from infections.



WHAT KINDS OF INFECTIONS COULD I GET FROM AN ANIMAL?

Animals can cause infections such as *Cryptosporidiosis* (or “crypto”), *Toxoplasmosis* (or “toxo”), *Mycobacterium avium complex* (or “MAC”), and other diseases. These diseases can give you problems like severe diarrhea, brain infections, and skin lesions.

WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MYSELF FROM INFECTIONS SPREAD BY ANIMALS?

- Always wash your hands well with soap and water after playing with or caring for animals. This is especially important before eating or handling food.
- Be careful about what your pet eats and drinks. Feed your pet only pet food or cook all meat thoroughly before giving it to your pet. Don't give your pet raw or undercooked meat.





- Ask someone who is not infected with HIV and is not pregnant to change your cat's litter box daily. If you must clean the box yourself, wear vinyl or household cleaning gloves and immediately wash your hands well with soap and water right after changing the litter.
- Don't handle animals that have diarrhea. If the pet's diarrhea lasts for more than 1 or 2 days, have a friend or relative who does not have HIV take your pet to your veterinarian.
- Don't bring home an unhealthy pet. Don't get a pet that is younger than 6 months old—especially if it has diarrhea. If you are getting a pet from a pet store, animal breeder, or animal shelter (pound), check the sanitary conditions and license of these sources. If you are not sure about the animal's health, have it checked out by your vet.
- Don't touch stray animals because you could get scratched or bitten.

- Don't ever touch the stool of any animal.
- Have your cat's nails clipped so it can't scratch you. If you do get scratched or bitten, immediately wash the wounds well with soap and water.
- Don't let your pet lick your mouth or any open cuts or wounds you may have.
- Don't kiss your pet.
- Keep fleas off your pet.
- Avoid reptiles such as snakes, lizards, and turtles. If you touch any reptile, immediately wash your hands well with soap and water. If you are bitten, you may need to seek medical advice.
- Avoid exotic pets such as monkeys, ferrets, raccoons, or other wild animals.
- Wear vinyl or household cleaning gloves when you clean aquariums or animal cages and wash your hands well right after you finish.





I HAVE A JOB THAT INVOLVES WORKING WITH ANIMALS. SHOULD I QUIT?

Jobs working with animals (such as jobs in pet stores, animal clinics, farms, and slaughterhouses) carry a risk for infections. Talk with your doctor about whether you should work with animals. People who work with animals should take extra precautions and follow their worksite's safety rules.

CAN SOMEONE WITH HIV GIVE IT TO THEIR PETS?

No. HIV cannot be spread to, from, or by cats, dogs, birds, or other pets.

ARE THERE ANY TESTS A PET SHOULD HAVE BEFORE I BRING IT HOME?

A pet should be in overall good health. You don't need special tests unless the animal has diarrhea or looks sick. If your pet looks sick, your vet can help you choose the tests it needs.

WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN I VISIT FRIENDS OR RELATIVES WHO HAVE ANIMALS?

When you visit anyone with pets, take the same precautions you would in your own home. Don't touch animals that may not be healthy.

SHOULD CHILDREN WITH HIV HANDLE PETS?

The same precautions apply for children as for adults. However, adults should be extra watchful and supervise an HIV-infected child's handwashing to prevent infections.



For more information, go to:

www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/brochures/pets.htm.

**Free referrals and information:
CDC-INFO**

1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)

TTY: 1-888-232-6348

In English, en Español

24 Hours/Day

**Free materials:
CDC National Prevention Information Network**

(800) 458-5231

1-301-562-1098 (International)

P.O. Box 6003

Rockville, MD 20849-6003

Free HIV/AIDS treatment information:

AIDSinfo

(800) 448-0440

Project Inform

(800) 822-7422

