

Your Pets, Your Children, Your Future

Healthy pets enhance your family's enjoyment of your pet

Your concerns about the health of your family extend well beyond the birth of your baby. So do ours.

For many people, pets are an important part of the family circle. Naturally, you want to protect your family, and your baby in particular, from needless exposure to internal parasites such as worms and external parasites such as fleas and ticks. Some pets can harbor zoonotic parasites that can potentially be transmitted from your pets to your family.

Making sure your pet is on a year-round parasite control program is good health care for your pet and your family. Also, be sure your pet receives regular checkups from your veterinarian and is treated for any external and internal parasites that might be present.

Soon your infant will be an exploring toddler. Be certain that pet feces are picked up outdoors at least daily and that any play areas and sandboxes are covered to prevent animals from soiling them. Parasites carried by wildlife can be particularly concerning, so do not feed wildlife and do not allow children to play in areas frequented by wildlife.

Toxocara (a type of roundworm) is a zoonotic parasite that can be acquired from soil contaminated with the feces of cats and dogs. It is of little concern during pregnancy but does pose a potential risk to infants and small children. Roundworm eggs are extremely hardy and remain in the environment (e.g., dirt, sandboxes) for a long time. Young children are particularly vulnerable to exposure and infection because they are more likely to put dirt, contaminated food or other objects into their mouths.

Pets greatly enhance our lives. However, precautions for preventing the spread of zoonotic diseases are necessary, particularly when small children are involved. Do not allow children to put foreign objects from the ground in their mouth, and always wash children's hands and your own after playing with pets.

Though the risk of these diseases affecting your baby is low, any danger can be further minimized with a few simple measures. Check out our 10 tips for protecting your family and your pet.

10 tips to protect your family

1. Wash your hands well after any exposure to soil (gardening), sandboxes and raw meat.
2. Eat only well-cooked meat.
3. Wash fresh fruits and vegetables to eliminate contamination.
4. Have a spouse, partner or friend change the litter box. If changing the litter is unavoidable, change it daily. Be certain to wash hands well after changing the litter.
5. Supervise infants sitting on the ground or on the floor. Do not allow them to eat dirt or food that has fallen.
6. Pick up dog and cat feces from the yard daily.
7. Cover sandboxes and play areas to prevent wildlife and strays from contaminating these areas.
8. Take your pet to the veterinarian regularly and have your pet tested for parasites at least yearly.
9. Deworm your cat or dog per your veterinarian's recommendations.
10. Administer year-round products to help control Toxocara infections and other products as directed by your veterinarian to control other parasites.

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