

ADDITIONAL PRECAUTIONS

For Immunocompromised Individuals

Zoonoses (diseases of animals that can be spread to humans) can affect anyone, but individuals with weakened or compromised immune systems are at increased risk. This handout provides some additional precautions that should be taken by immunocompromised persons to avoid zoonotic disease transmission.

Immunocompromised Individuals

Weakened or compromised immune systems can occur due to a variety of health issues or even a person's age. The reduced ability of the body's immune system to fight off infections can make these individuals more susceptible to a variety of pathogens, including zoonotic disease agents from animals. However, preventative actions can greatly minimize the risk of disease to these individuals.

Immunocompromised individuals may include:

- Infants and children less than 5 years old
- Elderly
- Pregnant women
- Persons receiving chemotherapy, organ transplants, or immunosuppressive drug therapies
- Persons with chronic medical conditions, such as diabetes or cirrhosis
- Persons with HIV/AIDS

Cleaning and Hygiene

Frequent hand washing is essential for immunocompromised persons. This is one of the most effective ways to prevent disease transmission, including zoonoses.

- **Hands should be washed often**
 - BEFORE—preparing food; eating; having contact with infants or young children
 - AFTER—having contact with pets or other animals; cleaning up pet waste or cages; using the restroom; blowing your nose; changing infant diapers

Immunocompromised persons should not clean animal waste areas, litter boxes, or fish tanks. These areas should be cleaned by someone who is not immunocompromised.

If this is not possible, precautions should be taken:

- Wear vinyl or rubber gloves when cleaning the area, litter pan, cage or aquarium
- Avoid generating and inhaling dust—wear a facial mask, if possible
- After cleaning animal areas, wash your hands (with the gloves on) with soap and water, then remove the gloves
- Immediately wash your hands with soap and water after removing the gloves

Animal Contact

Certain animals can pose an increased risk of zoonotic disease transmission to immunocompromised persons and should be avoided. These include:

- Reptiles (snakes, turtles, lizards)
- Amphibians (frogs, toads, newts, salamanders)
- Baby chicks and ducklings
- Animals younger than 6 months of age
- Exotic pets, such as monkeys
- Wild animals, such as raccoons

Immunocompromised individuals should:

- **Avoid stray or wild animals**
 - The health of stray animals is unknown
 - Wildlife and waterfowl can be carriers of zoonotic diseases
 - Transmission may occur through bites or scratches from the animal or through other contact
- **Not handle animals that have diarrhea**
 - If the diarrhea continues for more than 1 or 2 days, have a friend or relative (who is not immunocompromised) take your pet to a veterinarian to determine the cause
- **Not let pets lick any open cuts, wounds or your mouth**
- **Keep pet's nails clipped to minimize scratching**
 - If scratched or bitten, immediately wash the wound with soap and water
 - Consult your physician to determine whether additional treatment is needed

These precautions should also be used when visiting public animal displays, such as farms, petting zoos, or fairs.

For More Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Infectious Diseases. Healthy Pets Healthy People. www.cdc.gov/healthypets/index.htm

Centers of Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Infectious Diseases. For People at Extra Risk. www.cdc.gov/healthypets/extra_risk.htm

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Preventing infections from pets: A guide for people with HIV infection. www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/brochure/oi_pets.htm

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Pet-Scripton. www.cdc.gov/healthypets/pdf/petscript_general.pdf