

Zoonotic Disease Prevention

PRECAUTIONS FOR IMMUNOCOMPROMISED PEOPLE

Zoonoses are diseases that can be spread between animals and humans. People with weakened immune systems can be at greater risk. The steps below can reduce disease risks around animals.

Immunocompromised People

People may have weakened immune systems for several reasons.

- Primary causes are usually genetic or inherited, such as a congenital defect of the immune system.
- Secondary causes involve environmental factors, age, or certain medical treatments or therapies that weaken or damage the immune system.
- Both affect the ability of the body to respond to immune system challenges, such as zoonoses.
- Immunocompromised individuals include:
 - Infants and children, especially those younger than 5 years old
 - Older adults, especially those over 65
 - Pregnant women
 - Individuals with illnesses such as diabetes or HIV
 - People receiving medical therapy, such as immune suppressing drugs or chemotherapy treatment

Anyone who is immunocompromised should take extra precautions around livestock and poultry.

Hand Washing

Hand washing is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of disease.

- Wash hands often when around animals, especially:
 - **AFTER** – direct contact with animals, their poop, bedding or other objects in their environment
 - **BEFORE** – preparing or eating food
- Use warm water and soap. Lather and scrub at least 20 seconds (sing the Happy Birthday song twice).
- Supervise children to ensure proper hand washing.
- Alcohol hand gels can be used if hands are not visibly dirty.

Avoid Entry Into Your Body

Germs that enter your body can cause disease. Protect your eyes, nose, and mouth when you are around animals or in animal areas.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth when you are around animals, until you can wash your hands.
- Do not eat or drink around animals or in animal areas.
- If areas are dusty, wear a mask to prevent entry into your nose.
- Do not let children put their hands or objects (e.g., pacifiers) into their mouths around animals.

Wound Care

Germs can enter your body through breaks in the skin.

- Keep any cuts, scrapes, wounds, even chapped or dry skin covered when you are around animals.
- Avoid bites or scratches from animals.
- Promptly clean any scratches or bites received around animals.
 - Monitor the wound for signs of infection (e.g., redness, swelling, oozing). If seen, contact a healthcare provider.
- Monitor the wound for any signs of infection (e.g., redness, swelling, oozing). If seen, contact your healthcare provider.

Avoid Certain Animals

- Contact with certain animals can pose increased risk for zoonotic disease transmission and should be avoided. These include:
 - Reptiles (e.g., turtles, lizards, or snakes)
 - Amphibians (e.g., frogs or toads)
 - Baby chicks and ducklings
 - Pregnant livestock (e.g., sheep, goats, cattle) during delivery
 - Young animals, especially those less than 6 months of age, such as calves, lambs, goat kids, puppies or kittens

To learn more about zoonotic diseases and prevention measures, visit <https://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/zoonoses>.

Keep Animals Healthy

Keep your animals healthy to reduce zoonotic diseases. Talk to your veterinarian about the best health program for your animals.

- Have your animal checked annually by your veterinarian
- Keep animals up to date on vaccines and parasite control.
- Have animals that are ill, especially those with diarrhea, examined by a veterinarian.
- Do not feed raw or undercooked meats to pets.

Keep Animal Areas Clean

Zoonotic disease organisms can be shed in animal feces.

- Avoid contact with animal feces and urine
 - Immunocompromised persons should NOT clean animal waste areas, litter boxes, cages or aquaria. These areas should be cleaned by someone who is not immunocompromised.
 - Do not handle animals that have diarrhea
- If this cannot be avoided,
 - Wear gloves to avoid entry into breaks in the skin.
 - Avoid inhaling dust by wearing a face mask.
 - Immediately remove gloves and wash your hands with soap and water after cleaning animal areas.
- Keep litter boxes away from kitchen and eating areas.
- Do not allow animals to eat other animal's feces.
- Wash pet bedding and toys frequently.

Avoid Disease Vectors

Insects, ticks and wildlife can carry disease organisms that can harm you or your pet.

- Avoid vectors when you can.
- Use veterinarian recommended tick and flea preventatives for your animals.
- Do not allow pets to interact with wildlife.
- Protect yourself from bites from ticks and mosquitoes.
- When possible, avoid being outdoors during peak vector activity times (e.g., dusk and dawn) or wear EPA-approved insect repellants.
- Avoid handling stray or wild animals

For More Information

[Zoonotic Disease and Prevention Information.](#) Center for Food Security and Public Health, Iowa State University, College of Veterinary Medicine

[Healthy Pets, Healthy People: Specific Groups and Settings.](#) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention