

# To Your Health

## Pets and Petting Zoos

### Can my pets make me sick?

Pets are like family members in many households, but like all animals, they can carry dangerous organisms. You can come into contact with harmful bacteria, viruses or parasites when you play with and clean up after your pets, handle pet food, and when you visit an animal exhibit, fair or petting zoo.

Diseases called “zoonoses” can be passed from animals to humans or from humans to animals. Some zoonoses are very dangerous to humans including:

- Salmonellosis
- Toxoplasmosis
- Tuberculosis
- Rabies
- Infection with E. coli O157:H7



These diseases can be especially dangerous for young children, the elderly, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems. If left untreated, they can even be deadly.

### How do zoonoses move from animals to humans?

Animals can transmit harmful organisms in several ways:

- Scratches, bites and saliva
- Feces and fecal dust
- Coughs, sneezes or mucus

If you get these harmful organisms on your hands, you could spread them to your face, mouth, eyes or your food. If you have touched an animal, their toys, their food and treats or clean up after them, wash your hands right away before touching anything else!



**To Your Health!**



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Ways to protect yourself and your family:

### 1. Keep your pet healthy

- Take your pet to the veterinarian regularly and have it checked for diseases
- Keep your pet clean and its claws trimmed (if applicable)
- Beware of what your pet eats: garbage, raw meat and water from the toilet can be dangerous
- Keep away from wild animals: you and your pet can catch diseases from wild animals and their feces. (Don't forget that squirrels and other rodents can be dangerous too.)

### 2. Watch out for animal waste

- Use waterproof, disposable gloves and consider wearing a mask when cleaning cages, litter boxes, animal pens and fish tanks.
- Clean cages, boxes and pens daily. Put feces in a plastic bags, and promptly put in a garbage can,
- Never use pet feces for fertilizer or compost: it can carry dangerous organisms!
- Cover your child's sandbox since cats like to use sandboxes as litter boxes.

### 3. Keep clean

- After touching your pet and its toys, treats or food, wash your hands well with soap and warm water for 20 seconds. Do this before touching your face and before handling food.
- Keep pets away from food preparation, storage and dining areas.

### 4. Take care at zoos, fairs and animal exhibits

Soap and water handwashing is your best defense! Use hand sanitizers as an alternative only if there is no running water facilities available – but remember to visit a hand sink as soon as possible afterwards.



**Somerset County Department of Health**

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