



Introduction

Working with cats and dogs may increase a worker's risk of exposure to pathogens (germs such as bacteria, viruses and parasites) which can cause zoonotic diseases. Zoonotic diseases are infectious diseases transmitted between animals and people. Rabies, salmonellosis, and toxoplasmosis are some examples of diseases that can be transmitted to humans from cats and dogs.

This document provides employers and workers with information on zoonotic diseases associated with cats and dogs, including how workers can become infected, diseases of concern, and control measures that can be implemented to protect workers' health.

Sources of Exposure to Zoonotic Diseases and Transmission to People

Workers can be exposed to pathogens from cats and dogs through:

- A bite or scratch from an infected animal
- Direct contact with feces, saliva, urine or blood
- Touching contaminated objects, such as cages and bedding, and then touching their eyes, nose, or mouth
- Eating or drinking contaminated food or water
- Breathing in aerosols or droplets, such as dried urine or dust from bedding materials, from an infected animal
- Fleas or ticks on an animal

Occupations that may be at risk of getting a zoonotic disease from cats and dogs include:

- Animal shelter employees
- Dog daycare operators
- Dog walkers
- Groomers
- Kennel employees
- Pet store employees
- Pet trainers
- Veterinary clinic employees

Zoonotic Diseases

The list below provides general information on some of the zoonotic diseases that can be transmitted to workers from cats and dogs. This list is not exhaustive, and it is recommended that employers and workers understand the diseases that may be found in their specific work locations and the symptoms associated with these diseases.



Disease	Pathogen	Animal	Possible Workplace Exposure	Symptoms in People	Incubation Period (time from exposure to symptom development)
Bartonellosis, also known as Cat scratch disease	Bacteria	Cats	Scratch, lick or bite from an infected animal	Fever, swollen lymph nodes, pustule (raised bump) at the site of the scratch, headache, sore throat, red eyes, fatigue, chills	Pustules appear in 3 to 10 days. Additional symptoms appear in 14 to 21 days.
Leptospirosis	Bacteria	Dogs	Contact with infected animal, urine or anything contaminated with urine (e.g., food, water, soil)	Fever, headache, chills, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle pain, skin rash, eye infection, jaundice (yellowing of the eyes and skin)	2 to 3 weeks
Rabies	Virus	Cats, Dogs	Bite or scratch from an infected animal, an infected animal licking an open wound, contact with an infected animal's brain or nervous system tissue	Fever, headache, discomfort at the bite site, changes in mental state, anxiety, confusion, agitation, death	Weeks to months
Roundworms	Parasite	Cats, Dogs	Contact with feces or anything contaminated with feces	Fever, cough, wheezing, belly pain, enlarged liver, eye irritation, seeing spots or flashes of light, vision loss	Weeks to months
Salmonellosis	Bacteria	Cats, Dogs	Contact with infected animals, contaminated food and surfaces, eating or drinking contaminated food or drinks	Chills, fever, nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, stomach cramps, headache	6 to 72 hours
Tapeworm (Echinococcosis)	Parasite	Dogs	Contact with infected animal or objects contaminated with feces, eating or drinking contaminated food or drinks	No symptoms, or pain or discomfort in the belly, weakness, weight loss, chronic cough, chest pain, shortness of breath	Less than 5 to 15 years
Tapeworm (Dipylidium)	Parasite	Cats, Dogs	Ingestion of infected flea	No symptoms, tapeworm segments in feces	3 to 4 weeks
Toxoplasmosis	Parasite	Cats	Contact with contaminated feces, water, sand, or soil	Fever, headache, muscle pain, tiredness, swollen lymph nodes usually in the neck, vision changes	5 to 23 days

Each workplace is unique, and the employer is required to take every reasonable precaution for the protection of workers. Workplaces with workers at risk of exposure to zoonotic infections from cats and dogs must conduct a site specific [risk assessment](#) and implement appropriate control measures. A [risk checklist](#) can help identify risks and control measures.



After identifying the risks to workers, employers must implement the most appropriate control measures with consideration given to the [hierarchy of controls](#). A layered approach where multiple control measures are applied at the same time is recommended since a single control measure alone is not likely to be very effective.

The selected control measures must be based on the assessed risk to workers. Each workplace and even workers within the workplace can have different risk levels. Depending on the animal and the zoonotic disease, the control measures will vary. Some general control measures include:

- Vaccination, if available and appropriate for workers (e.g., rabies)
- Make sure animals are up to date with checkups, vaccinations, deworming and other parasite control
- Develop policies to determine steps needed if an animal showing signs of a zoonotic disease enters the workplace
- Avoid animals licking your face or wounds
- Keep animals away from wildlife or stray animals
- Keep animals away from food preparation areas
- Cover your cuts or scratches before handling animals
- Keep animal nails trimmed to prevent scratches
- If a bite or scratch occurs, clean it thoroughly with soap and water and if you are concerned, consult a health care provider
- [Wash your hands](#) regularly with soap and water, especially before and after:
 - Handling animals, saliva, urine, feces, or blood
 - Cleaning equipment
 - Handling pet food and treats
- [Clean and disinfect](#) animal bedding, cages, living areas, and food and water bowls regularly
- Safely handle and store pet food and treats:
 - Use dedicated dishes and utensils
 - Store in a dry area and according to package guidelines
 - Keep separate from human food
 - Thaw raw food properly by placing it in sealed containers and thawing it on the bottom shelf of a refrigerator

[Personal protective equipment](#) may vary based on the activity and animal involved and may include:

- Disposable gloves, such as PVC, nitrile, or rubber gloves
- Cut-resistant gloves
- Eye and face protection, such as safety goggles or face shields
- Fit-tested respiratory protection, such as an N95 respirator
- Coveralls or aprons
- Rubber boots or boot covers



An emergency preparedness and response plan is useful in workplaces where exposure to a zoonotic disease is a plausible threat. A documented plan should outline how to respond to workers who become sick. It can be written in the form of a policy and procedure.

Workers who become sick should be encouraged to take time away from work and seek medical attention. A sick leave policy can support this time off. Individuals who continue to work while sick can present a hazard to others if they are unable to work safely.

If the illness originated while at work, conduct an incident investigation to determine the cause and attempt to prevent recurrence.

Call 911 for medical assistance if a worker develops life-threatening symptoms. Inform their emergency contact and report to applicable parties (e.g., external regulators, health and safety committee, etc.).



Any workers experiencing illness, even mild symptoms, after being exposed to suspected or confirm sources of a zoonotic disease should contact their employer and a health care provider. Your health care provider may contact the local public health authority, if necessary. Contacting the relevant public health authority will ensure timely testing and reporting of human illness to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), initiating an epidemiological investigation, and taking steps to help prevent further illness

If you think you have been exposed to rabies, seek medical attention immediately.

Additionally, the [government department responsible for health and safety](#) and [worker's compensation board](#) may need to be notified if the reporting requirements for an occupational illness for your jurisdiction have been met.

Notify the [Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#) if a cat or dog being cared for or controlled by the workplace is suspected of having a [reportable disease](#).

Becoming ill with a zoonotic disease or being involved in a zoonotic disease outbreak can have an impact on workers' mental health, and may lead to increased stress, anxiety, and depression. Mental health resources and support should be provided to all workers, including access to an [employee assistance program](#), if available.

Refer to the following mental health information resources for more information:

- [Mental health](#) – Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety
- [Mental health support: Get help](#) – Public Health Agency of Canada
- [Mental health and wellness](#) – Public Health Agency of Canada