

# Safely caring for a cat

For people who are pregnant or have a weakened immune system



Cats are an important member of the family. Cats can also carry diseases that put people who are pregnant or have a weakened immune system at higher risk for infection. Some diseases that cats can spread to people include: Cat Scratch Disease (*Bartonella*), Tularemia (Rabbit Fever), Plague (*Yersinia*), Toxoplasmosis, and intestinal parasites (tapeworms, hookworms, roundworms, Giardia).

**If you or a family member is pregnant or immunocompromised, you do not have to rehome your cat. Consider these precautions to prevent disease:**



**POSTPONE ADOPTING OR FOSTERING A STRAY CAT IN YOUR HOME.** Stray cats are more likely to have intestinal parasites and bacterial infections that can spread to you or your family.

**KEEP CATS INDOORS.** Cats who go outside are more likely to:

- ▶ Be exposed to bacteria and parasites that cause diseases.
- ▶ Bring ticks or fleas into your home which could spread disease to family members.
- ▶ Play with, fight, or hunt wild animals or feral cats which can infect your cat with diseases.

**AVOID CAT SCRATCHES.** Use toys on a string or ribbon when playing with your cat, and/or provide a scratching post. Scratches that break the skin allow bacteria including *Bartonella* from the cat to enter a person's body and cause illness.

**USE FLEA AND TICK PREVENTATIVE MEDICATIONS YEAR-ROUND.** Make sure medications are approved and prescribed by a veterinarian. Cats are sensitive to a variety of chemicals, and products used on other animals may be toxic to cats. If your cat is vulnerable to flea or tick bites, people in the house are also more likely to bite and become infected by diseases carried by the pests.



- ▶ *Yersinia* and *Bartonella* can be transmitted by bites from fleas.
- ▶ Tularemia, Lyme disease and other diseases can be spread to people by tick bites.

**DEWORM YOUR CAT REGULARLY.** Use an approved medication from a veterinarian. Cats who are infected with internal parasites may not show any signs, yet their internal parasites (for example tapeworms, hookworms, roundworms, Giardia) can be infectious to humans.



*Tell a veterinarian if someone in your family is planning on becoming pregnant or has a weakened immune system. This will help the veterinarian provide the best recommendations for your cat and your family.*

**BUREAU OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASES**

[www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/dph/bcd.htm](http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/dph/bcd.htm) | [DHSDPHBCD@dhs.wi.gov](mailto:DHSDPHBCD@dhs.wi.gov)

Wisconsin Department of Health Services | Division of Public Health





## PREVENTION

Handwashing helps prevent the spread of many diseases, including diseases carried by your cat.

### Washing your hands is especially important after:

- ▶ Scooping the litter box or cleaning up cat poop. Cats can spread parasites in their poop.
- ▶ Touching soil or sand outside.
  - ▶ Outdoor cats (barn cats, feral cats, the neighbor's cat) can contaminate the environment with their poop.
  - ▶ People may be exposed while gardening, playing in a sandbox, or doing yard work.
- ▶ Petting or snuggling your cat. Bacteria can live on cat hair.
- ▶ Handling cat food. Bacteria can live in dry, canned, and home-prepared cat food.



## WHEN TO SEEK CARE

### Seek care for your cat from a veterinarian if they have any of the following symptoms:

- ▶ Abnormally low appetite
- ▶ Diarrhea and/or vomiting
- ▶ Other unusual or worrisome changes
- ▶ Abnormally low interest in playing or excessive tiredness
- ▶ Wound is draining pus, getting bigger, or not healing

*Pay special attention to your cat's health if they spend time outside without supervision.*



### Seek care from a doctor if someone in your family has:

- ▶ Scratch or bite wounds that develop small, raised bumps
- ▶ Swollen lymph nodes
- ▶ Fever
- ▶ Unusual tiredness
- ▶ Muscle aches
- ▶ Been bitten by a cat. Cat bites can easily cause an infection

*If someone in your family becomes sick, contact a doctor, and let them know there is a cat at home. Discuss any recent bites, scratches, or illnesses the veterinarian diagnosed in your cat.*



## SAFE LITTER BOX MANAGEMENT

If you are pregnant or have a weakened immune system, ask someone else to clean the litter box. If this is not possible, take precautions when scooping the litter box:

- ▶ Wear a new pair of latex or nitrile gloves to scoop litter. Do not touch your face, mouth, door handles, etc. while your hands or gloves are contaminated.
- ▶ Scoop litter **every 24 hours**. *Toxoplasma* becomes infective in cat poop after 24 hours.
- ▶ Wash the litter box in a separate sink from where food is prepared.

**Everyone should wash their hands with soap and water immediately after scooping litter or coming into contact with cat poop.**

