

# TO YOUR *Health*

*Pet's* 

## ZOO-A-what-A?



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Has anyone heard the word zoonosis lately? Have you wondered to yourself what zoonosis means? Zoonosis is a disease that can be transmitted from vertebrate animals to humans, or vice versa.

With the current COVID-19 epidemic taking place, researchers and epidemiologist (scientist that study disease trends which include where and how often they occur as well as trying to figure out possible control of the disease) have been trying to figure out where this particular coronavirus may have originated. There have been early indications that COVID-19 is zoonotic and may have originated in bats. There is still a lot of research that needs to be done to figure out the whole picture.

So far, there has been no indications that people who are infected with the COVID-19 virus, can cause symptomatic disease in their pets. However, it has been advised that if you are infected with the virus to try to limit close contact with your pets. If possible, have someone else take the responsibility of caring for your pet while you are sick. If this is not possible, then attempt to limit direct contact like hugging and kissing your pet and wash hands before handling food and changing water. In other words, treat your pet like any other member of your household and try to isolate yourself as much as possible.

Rabies is another well-known disease that is zoonotic. Rabies is a viral disease that has no known treatment and is almost 100% fatal. It affects the central nervous system (the brain and nerves) and causes variable clinical signs such as decreased appetite, inability to swallow, issues with cranial nerves (which control eyes, ears and face), abnormal behavior, stumbling around, paralysis, altered vocalization, seizures, and eventual death.

There are two forms of Rabies. The furious form causes the affected animal to become aggressive and it tries

to bite anything around it (including itself). The second form is paralytic, where initially the head and neck muscles are affected which causes difficulty in swallowing, followed by complete paralysis and death. In both cases the animal seems to be salivating a lot, but this is not because of increased production of saliva but because of the inability to swallow it. Dogs can present with either form of Rabies. In cats and wild animals such as skunks, racoons, and foxes, the furious form is more common. In cattle the paralytic form is more common.

Saliva is a concern, because that is where the virus can be found in abundance and transmitted to other animals or people. This transmission can be either through bite wounds or through contact with the saliva to other open wounds, eyes or mucous membranes (mouth). Therefore, even if a person has not been bitten by an animal positive for Rabies, they should talk with their health care provider and consider post-exposure prophylactic treatment if they have been treating or caretaking for that animal.

It is extremely important for your own safety, as well as general public safety, to prevent the possibility of Rabies infection in your pets. Luckily there are many safe commercial vaccines available for our pets and other companion animals. Because of the safety and effectiveness of these vaccines, it is enforced by local, county, state and federal agencies to have your pets Rabies vaccinated. By keeping the Rabies vaccine current in your pets and avoiding coming in direct contact with wild animals such as skunks, racoons, foxes and bats (which are natural reservoirs), we have been able to significantly decrease the amount of human deaths caused by the Rabies virus in the United States.

Hopefully, the next time you hear the term zoonosis, you will recognize what is being discussed and the importance of it to your health.



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