

Pregnant? That's No Reason To Give Up Your Cat

Fear, rather than common sense, takes over when someone first hears that toxoplasmosis—a disease harmful to unborn babies—can be transmitted by cats. Unfortunately, this news leads many pregnant women, often urged by well-meaning friends and family, to give up their beloved feline. But the good news is that health professionals continue to assert that, if caution is taken, there is no reason why the family feline has to leave home.

Toxoplasmosis is a parasite found in rats, mice, pigs, cows, sheep, chickens and birds, and is shed in the feces of infected cats. The disease—transmitted to humans by handling contaminated meat, cat litter, or soil—can cause cold-like symptoms and may last one to 12 weeks with little to no lasting effects on most people. However, if a pregnant woman gets the disease, it can be transmitted to the fetus causing possible brain or eye defects. Health officials report that most infections result from eating undercooked meat, not from cats.

So there's no need to give up the family cat if you're pregnant. Simply get someone else to change the litter box for the duration of the pregnancy. If that's not possible, use gloves when handling the litter. And since the feces is not contagious for the first 24 hours, removing the litter daily and practicing good hygiene afterwards significantly reduces any chance of exposure. Follow these preventive measures and talk with your physician about how you can protect yourself from this disease, and you and your feline friends can continue enjoying each other's company for many years to come.



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10 Ways To Reduce Your Risk Of Rabies

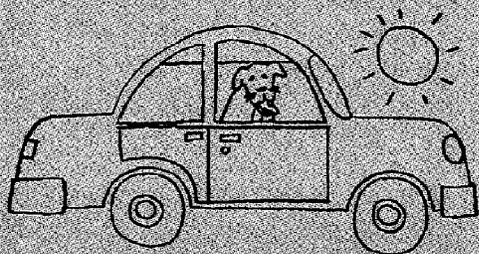


1. Vaccinate your pets against rabies.
2. Don't keep wild animals as pets. Americans keep more than 1.5 million exotic animals as pets—animals which cannot be vaccinated against rabies.
3. Do not handle wildlife—dead or alive. While the virus won't survive very long in dead animals, you should wear moisture-proof gloves before picking them up.
4. Avoid animals displaying unnatural behavior. Wild animals who are unusually friendly or displaying other unnatural behaviors may have the rabies virus.
5. Discourage contact between pets and wildlife. Don't let your pets roam or encourage them to interact with unfamiliar domestic or wild animals.
6. Feed your pets indoors. Leaving food outside often attracts stray dogs, cats, and wildlife to your yard.
7. Animal-proof your trash. Make sure your trash lids are locked, and don't leave bags of garbage outside the cans.
8. Prevent wild animals from getting into the house. Prune tree branches that overhang the roof. Keep screens on windows and cover small openings, such as chimneys, furnace ducts, and eaves.
9. Report all stray animals to animal control. Stray animals may not be vaccinated for rabies. They also run a high risk of exposure to wild animals who carry the disease.
10. Give your child some guidelines to follow. Do not frighten young children, but make sure they learn some basic rules about protecting themselves from strange or unfamiliar animals.

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Flyers Help Keep Pets Safe from Killer Heat



It's hot, it's humid, and there you are in a store parking lot, worried because someone has left his dog locked in a car. You know that the inside of a car can heat up to 110 degrees F. in just 10 minutes on an 80-degree day—even with the windows open. Pets in this situation not only suffer needlessly but also could die from heat stress. What should you do?

First try to locate the owner as quickly as possible. If the car is parked at a store, ask a store employee to page the owner. If the owner cannot be found quickly, call the police to free the animal from the car. Take first-aid measures if needed. Symptoms of heat stress to watch for in a dog or cat include heavy panting, rapid breathing, staggering, and weakness. When breathing suddenly becomes quiet after it displays these symptoms, the animal may collapse. A heat-stricken animal can die in minutes, but quick action and follow-up veterinary care may save its life.

Take the stricken animal to a shady spot. Slowly cool the animal by placing it in cool, not cold, water. Reduce body heat gradually. Apply ice packs to the head and neck. Take the distressed pet to a veterinarian as soon as possible. Treatment for dehydration and possibly other serious problems will be necessary.

In less urgent situations, you may want to leave the vehicle operator a friendly note that includes the information listed above. The MSPCA's "Warning: Hot Cars Kill Pets!" flyer lets people know that on hot days their pet would be safer at home. For copies of the flyer, visit the MSPCA shelter or animal hospital closest to you, or call (617) 541-5187.

REPORT CRUELTY

Report suspected animal abuse in Massachusetts by calling the MSPCA's Law Enforcement Department at

(617) 522-6008

or

1-800-628-5808

Outside Massachusetts, contact your local police department or animal protection group.