



Ask the Vet

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Transmitting Disease

There are only a few diseases that you as a pet sitter can carry from one house to another. Fortunately, most of the contagious diseases of cats and dogs require fairly close and intense contact between the pets. In most cases, the disease of cats and dogs are specific, so they cannot be transmitted between species. The most well known exception to this rule is Rabies.

The most contagious canine disease that you could track from one house to another is Parvovirus. Parvo is a virus that causes vomiting and diarrhea, in dogs. Wherever the dog has passed vomit and diarrhea, the virus is left viable for several months even in the rain, heat or cold. You can not see the virus, but you can track it on your shoes to the next house. This virus is most commonly contracted by unvaccinated puppies, but unvaccinated adults can contract the disease. If a dog has received the appropriate DHLPP-C vaccinations, it is protected against most forms of the disease. This is why you should require that all of your clients show proof of current vaccinations.

Potentially you could also carry fecal contaminants from one house to another in both cats and dogs. Cats with roundworms, coccidia, of giardia, all intestinal parasites, pass these organisms or their eggs can lead to infection in another cat. The same is true for dogs who can carry roundworms, hookworms, whipworms, coccidia and giardia in their stool. Again, transmission is through oral ingestion of the feces. Children in particular can develop cutaneous lesions from ingesting feces contaminated with hookworm eggs.

As far as other zoonotic diseases (diseases which you can pick up yourself from pets,) fortunately these are not large in number either. The most life threatening disease is Rabies which can be contracted through bite wounds. Be sure all pets have proof of current Rabies vaccine before you commit to sit for that pet. Another disease that can be contracted from

bite wounds is an infection called Pasteurellosis. This is caused by a bacteria carried in the mouth of dogs and particularly cats. All bite wounds should be cleaned immediately with soap and water as well as hydrogen peroxide then your physician should be contacted.

Cat scratch fever is another disease that is believed to be transmitted by cats through bite wounds, scratches or licking of a wound on a human. It is a disease seen most commonly in children, immunocompromised people or people with a lot of contact with different cats, yet it is not a common disease. It causes a fever and swelling of lymph nodes in the region of contact. You can not identify a cat with this disease, it will look completely healthy. Once again, if you develop any signs of this disease call your physician.

A disease of concern for pregnant women is toxoplasmosis, which causes congenital birth defects. This disease can be transmitted in cat stools shedding oocyst, cats get the disease from eating meat of wild animals such as mice, therefore this is more common in feral cats. Domestic indoor cats do not commonly shed the disease, but to be safe do not clean the litter box while pregnant.

Skin disease of concern for pet sitters would include Ringworm (a fungus) and Scabies (a mite). Ringworm causes reddish, circular lesions on your skin. A cat or a dog can carry the fungus without any lesions or with similar lesions to those found on humans. Scabies mites are found on dogs with Sarcoptic mange. These are very itchy dogs with dry, scaly skin. Lesions often involve the face, ears and chest of the dog. You get the mites by having close skin contact with the skin of the infected dog. These are the primary diseases you may spread from house to house or from the pets for which you sit. Meet the pet and its owner before the sit and inquire about any current diseases and their treatment. Always clean your hands and shoes between visits especially if you have acquired fecal matter on your shoes.