

## Could Outdoor Cats Transmit Disease to My Child?

**Becky Robinson, CatChannel expert on feral and stray cats, says outdoor cats pose minimal health risks to people.**

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**Q:** Over the winter, two stray cats "moved in" and are living under our porch. Now that the weather is nice, we're concerned that the cats may harm or possibly transmit disease to our 5-year-old daughter when she plays in the yard. What should we do?

**A:** The first thing to do is take the cats to a veterinarian for spay or neuter services and vaccinations. Ask your local animal shelter or veterinarian about local low-cost clinics.

Are the cats living under your porch feral or stray? If these cats are feral, they will not approach your daughter. If your outdoor cats are strays, they may become friendly.

Most animals will keep their distance from young children, but you should always supervise your daughter when she is around any animal. Children sometimes reach out instinctively to grab an animal's tail. Now is the perfect age to teach your daughter to never grab or chase an animal.

With proper precautions, the chance of you or your daughter contracting a disease from an outdoor cat is minimal. Use common sense to keep your yard clean. It is important to wash all cat food and water bowls several times a week with hot water and soap. Keep the cats' shelters clean. I recommend that you place a box filled with sand, mulch or soil in a secluded area that the cats can use as a litterbox.

There are many options for nontoxic deterrents that can be used to keep cats and other critters away from the areas where your daughter plays. You can scatter fresh orange and lemon peels or use a nontoxic citrus-scented spray to keep cats out of your yard. If your daughter has a play sandbox, keep it covered to prevent the cats — and other animals — from using it.

The most important thing is to use common sense, and always supervise your children when they play outside. For more information about stray and feral cats, check out my previous articles or visit the Alley Cat Allies website. Good luck, and enjoy a happy and safe summer!