

Prevent Pet Parasites

Take steps to protect cats from disease risks.

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Many pet owners know that parasites can make their animals sick and that parasitic diseases can be transmitted from pets to people. What they might not know is that there are easy steps they can take to virtually eliminate the risks parasites pose.

A fall 2006 survey of more than 1,000 cat and dog owners across the United States by the Companion Animal Parasite Council (CAPC), a nonprofit dedicated to fostering the human-animal relationship, revealed that relatively few pet owners took preventative measures against parasites.

When it comes to heartworm, for example, 92 percent of survey respondents said they'd heard of it, and 82 percent knew it can be prevented. Yet even though 75 percent have a veterinarian who recommends a monthly heartworm preventative, only 31 percent said they use such a product for heartworms and other parasites.

A year-round preventative is on the list of the top five things pet owners can do to protect their animals and families from the risks associated with the parasites that pets come into contact with daily, according to the CAPC. Such risks exist even in cold weather, because some parasites, such as fleas and ticks, live in homes year-round.

Tips to protect your family: Wash your hands after contact with an animal.

Pick up cat and dog waste from your yard daily, especially in areas where both children and animals play.

Cover sandboxes to protect them from fecal contamination.

Have your pet tested for parasites by a veterinarian at least once a year, and administer year-round preventative medications to control parasites that can be passed from pets to people.

For more information on parasites, parasitic disease and how to keep the cat and human members of families healthy, visit the CAPC website.