

## National Pet Week Highlights Cat Health Care

### **Veterinarians stress the importance of regular wellness exams for cats and dogs.**

Posted: May 9, 2008 2 a.m. EDT

Care and commitment from cat owners to their pets, means longer, healthier lives for cats. Pets are more popular than ever, as indicated by the most recent data compiled by the American Veterinary Medical Association, which show that the number of U.S. households owning pets grew to 68.7 million in 2006 from 61.1 million in 2001, an increase of 12.4 percent.

The growing popularity of companion animals highlights the need for more public awareness about the importance of caring for cats and dogs, says Tom McPheron, AVMA spokesman. National Pet Week, May 4-10, was established in 1981 by the AVMA to promote responsible pet ownership and awareness of veterinary medicine to celebrate the human-animal bond.

"I think it doesn't get the attention that it deserves," McPheron says. "There is a great need for more public understanding about the importance of pets in our lives. That's why we have the National Pet Week."

Across the nation this week, veterinarians, veterinary technicians and others will use this opportunity to educate the public about how cats and dogs improve human health, and how to return the favor as pet owners.

For cat owners, McPheron says that regular visits to the veterinarian for vaccinations and check-ups play a key role in a cat's health. Cat owners, however, are less likely to take their pets to the animal clinic, he says.

Households that owned cats saw the veterinarian an average of 1.7 times in 2006, a 5.6 percent decrease since 2001, according to the AVMA. Each cat saw the veterinarian an average of 0.7 times a year in 2006, down 30 percent from 2001.

Cat owners might assume that their pets are safe from disease if they're kept indoors, McPheron says, "but that's not true." Veterinarians urge cat owners to seek regular health care, including rabies vaccinations, so they can be protected.

The average dog gets checked by a veterinarian more often, but the rate is not yet 100 percent, McPheron says. Because dogs tend to be more social animals and are exposed to diseases and parasites at places like dog parks, veterinarians recommend that dogs get regular wellness exams.

Households that owned dogs saw the veterinarian an average of 2.6 times in 2006, a 3.7 percent decrease since 2001, according to the AVMA. Each dog saw the veterinarian an average of 1.5 times, down 21.1 percent from 2001.

Veterinary care in 2006 was a \$24.5 billion business, according to the AVMA. In inflation-adjusted dollars, pet owners spent about \$21.6 billion in 2001.

An increased level of care, along with the commitment from cat and dog owners to their pets, means longer — and healthier — lives for animals, according to the AVMA.

This year, the theme of National Pet Week is "Pets Jazz up Our Lives" in recognition of the AVMA convention July 19-22 in New Orleans. For more information, visit the AVMA website or go to [Petweek.org](http://Petweek.org).