



**Cranston**  
ANIMAL HOSPITAL  
Zoonotic Diseases of Dogs

Diseases transmitted from animals to humans are called zoonotic diseases. Zoonotic diseases usually live out their complex life cycles in animals, but sometimes cross into human bodies. Zoonosis may be bacterial, viral, or parasitic. Humans are not likely to catch a disease through their pets, but in very rare cases it can happen. Fortunately, most of these diseases are mild and can be easily treated. Others, like toxoplasmosis, can be far more serious.

Pet-owning households with young children, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems need to be aware that their animals can play host to disease-causing microorganisms. Usually contracting a pet-borne disease requires very close contact with animals or their excretions, so zoonotic diseases can be avoided with cleanliness, regular pet examinations and vaccinations.

Here are some common pet-borne illnesses that can make people sick

❖ **Rabies**

- ❖ This is perhaps the most serious of all zoonotic diseases
- ❖ Rabies vaccination of dogs and cats is required by state and federal laws
- ❖ Rabies is endemic to the United States and is still an active problem in Rhode Island
- ❖ Two of the most common species to carry rabies on the East Coast are raccoons and bats
- ❖ Feral cats are becoming a particularly notable problem in Rhode Island
- ❖ It is transmitted by the saliva of a rabid animal, usually through a bite
- ❖ Indoor cats also need to be vaccinated for rabies
  - ❖ If a bat came into your house, your cat would be the first one to go after it
- ❖ Any dog or cat that is not up-to-date on rabies vaccinations and is bitten by a suspected rabid animal will need to go through quarantine
- ❖ Any dog or cat that is not up-to-date on rabies vaccination and bites a person or other animal may need to be euthanized and tested for rabies

❖ **Leptospirosis**

- ❖ This is a bacterial infection that can affect both the liver and kidneys
- ❖ It is shed in the urine of many mammals including
  - ❖ Dogs
  - ❖ Rats
  - ❖ Raccoons
  - ❖ Opossums
  - ❖ Deer
  - ❖ Cattle

❖ **Intestinal parasites:**

- ❖ Intestinal parasites can cause serious, sometimes life-threatening illness in people, especially children
  - ❖ Children often put their hands in their mouths, providing an easy route for germs/parasite eggs to travel into their bodies
- ❖ It is our responsibility to decrease the intestinal parasite population by regularly deworming our pets
- ❖ Please see our, Parasite: Risk and Prevention hand-out for more information

