

Resources for pet owners and their family members:

- 🐾 Pets Are Wonderful Support (PAWS)
645 Harrison St, Ste 100
San Francisco, CA 94107
www.pawssf.org
415-979-9550
info@pawssf.org
- 🐾 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)
www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/brochures/pets.htm
www.cdc.gov/healthypets/bone marrow transplant.htm
- 🐾 Massachusetts Department of Public Health
617-983-6804
www.Mass.Gov/DPH
- 🐾 Massachusetts Veterinary Medical Association
163 Lakeside Ave
Marlborough, MA 01752
www.massvet.org
508-460-9333
staff@massvet.org
- 🐾 Your physician, pediatrician, oncologist, and veterinarian

Numerous scientific studies have documented the physical and mental health benefits of pet ownership. People young and old, healthy and infirm, adventurous and housebound can all enjoy the benefits of sharing their lives with a pet.

For individuals with an immune-suppressive disease—those undergoing medical treatment that weakens the immune system, or for those at a stage of life where the immune system may be impaired—the physical and psychological benefits of pet ownership may be even more important. For these groups, the increased risks from living with pets can be safely managed.



The purpose of this brochure is to help individuals with an immune-suppressive disease or condition enjoy the companionship and other benefits offered by household pets while minimizing the chance of getting sick from them.

IMMUNOCOMPROMISED PET OWNERS and THEIR PETS

*Guidelines for living with pets
while coping with an
immunosuppressive disease or
a medical treatment that
suppresses the immune system*



Living with a pet is generally safe for most family members. Following general principles of personal hygiene and a commitment to your pets' health care and maintenance are excellent ways to minimize risks and complications. Individuals with immunosuppressive disease have a slight risk increase, and most risks are definable and manageable with your veterinarian's assistance.

Some medical conditions and situations that can involve reduced immune function are:

- 🐾 HIV/AIDS
- 🐾 Chemotherapy or treatment with high doses of steroids
- 🐾 Organ transplant recipients
- 🐾 Young children and the elderly
- 🐾 Individuals with acute or chronic illness such as diabetes, kidney failure, or liver disease
- 🐾 Pregnant women and their fetuses
- 🐾 Individuals with congenital immune deficiencies
- 🐾 Splenectomy patients

Here are some general principles to avoid zoonoses, or diseases spread from animals to people:

- 🐾 Practice good hygiene including washing your hands regularly.
- 🐾 Keep your pet in excellent health following a systematic program of regular veterinary care, flea and tick control, intestinal parasite monitoring and control, and monitoring for early identification and treatment of conditions that might threaten either the pet or household family members.
- 🐾 Choose your pet carefully. Some suggestions are to avoid pets with aggressive tendencies, neonates, puppies or kittens, and reptiles or amphibians because of the risk of salmonella infection.
- 🐾 Know and practice safe litter box habits if you have cats. These include, but are not limited to, keeping the box away from sites of food preparation, having someone who is not immune-compromised do all litter box chores, wearing gloves when handling the litter box, washing hands afterwards, and properly disposing of litter.

- 🐾 Feed a high quality diet.
- 🐾 Raw or undercooked meat and unpasteurized milk may be contaminated with organisms that spread to other household members, even if the pet is not sick, and should be avoided.
- 🐾 Have a good relationship with a veterinarian willing and able to talk with you about your pets' health care.

This brochure was prepared by the Communicable Diseases and Public Health Committee of the Massachusetts Veterinary Medical Association (MVMA). It is intended for distribution without charge to the public.



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