

Who needs the information

Your clients — and members of the pet's household — who are or may become immunocompromised:

- Pregnant women
- Elderly persons
- Infants/neonates
- People receiving chemotherapy, transplant patients, or those on immunosuppressive medications (including prolonged courses of corticosteroids)
- Persons with diabetes mellitus, chronic renal failure, or other chronic conditions
- Persons with HIV or AIDS
- Splenectomy patients
- Those with cirrhosis of the liver or advanced-stage alcoholism



Potentially, someone in every household with a pet may become immunocompromised at some point during a pet's lifetime.



Identifying clients who may need this information

Some clients might not realize they may be immunocompromised. Questions on your New Client Form can help you determine if the pet lives with an immunocompromised individual, and the extent of information you need to provide about zoonotic disease.

These questions can help a client feel more comfortable approaching you now and in the future because you are being inclusive about everyone in the household.

A sample New Client Form is available at the PAWS website at www.pawssf.org

prevention – existing pets

A client informs you that his elderly mother just moved into his home... A woman undergoing chemotherapy for treatment of cancer... Young children, pregnant women, those with HIV...

All are scenarios that you may encounter during a regular wellness exam for the pets of these individuals. These individuals should take precautions to keep their pets healthy. Healthy pets pose a minimal risk of transmitting a zoonotic disease, especially, when appropriate preventative measures are followed.

It is important to remind clients of the following preventative measures at each and every visit:

- Feed your pet a high quality commercial diet. Avoid feeding raw or undercooked meat or unpasteurized milk.
- Good flea control is essential; be sure to use a monthly flea preventative. Regular screening for intestinal parasite is also recommended.
- Regular and frequent handwashing is extremely important
- Prevent pets from drinking from the toilet or eating feces
- Keep pet litter boxes, dishes and beds as clean as possible. Litter boxes should be cleaned daily, ideally by an immunocompetent person. If the immunocompromised person is to be cleaning a litter box, they should wear latex gloves and wash their hands thoroughly afterwards.

For additional information, see the PAWS brochure entitled "Safe Pet Guidelines"

additional resources

The PAWS website www.pawssf.org contains education sheets such as: Safe Pet Guidelines, Your Cat and Your Health, Your Bird and Your Health, Pets and the Immunocompromised Patient (available at PAWS in brochure form for \$1). Also on the website are a sample new client form and a full reference list.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have several statements and brochures available at their Healthy Pets Healthy People site: www.cdc.gov/healthypets/.

CDC brochures: Preventing Infections from Pets: A Guide for People with HIV Infection... (also available in Spanish) www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/brochure/oj_pets.htm.

Safe guidelines for pet reptiles (Reptile Rules www.doh.wa.gov/here/CRA; Reptile Handling Steps www.cdc.gov/healthypets/pdf/reptile.pdf).



The Immunocompromised Household: Informing Clients about Pets and Zoonotic Disease

a guide for veterinarians



paws

Pets Are Wonderful Support

DEDICATED TO PRESERVING THE HUMAN-ANIMAL BOND

PAWS

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Why it's our job

We give information about zoonoses to our clients all the time. Think about the family with kids whose dog you've just diagnosed with ringworm.

While veterinarians and human health care providers share responsibility for providing information about zoonoses, veterinarians are often the educational resource for clients about their pet's health and any zoonotic risks that pets may pose.

The love and companionship pets provide is invaluable and can help improve quality of life and reduce stress in people who have medical conditions. Further, having a pet can actually improve one's health.

A brochure on the health benefits of the human-animal bond is available at the PAWS website at www.pawssf.org

The risk of zoonotic disease transmission from pets is minimal, especially when clients take extra precautions to ensure a healthy household.

While it's not our job to give medical advice to clients about their own health, we can ensure the healthiest pet possible and suggest ways that people can reduce the risk of acquiring a zoonotic disease, especially in a household with an immunocompromised member.

Incentive – why should we reach out?

- **Client satisfaction** leads to increased compliance, healthier pets, and client retention.
- **Veterinarian's Oath:** our scientific knowledge and skills benefit society through the protection of animal health and the promotion of public health.
- **Liability:** failure to provide information about zoonoses constitutes a disservice to patients and clients, and practitioners may be liable.

In the exam room – client/doctor communication

The exam room offers a safe and confidential place to express their concerns. An extra few questions during the appointment goes a long way (and won't take much additional time).

- Review their New Client Form to identify clients who may be immunocompromised.
- Ask about other family members; be inclusive.
- Offer the service verbally during visits: "If anyone in your household is immunocompromised, we can set up a preventive program to decrease the risk of Fluffy transmitting any zoonotic diseases to your family member." (If the answer is no, you have made yourself available as a resource if needed later on.)
- You can also include the client brochures mentioned on the back of this brochure in your new puppy/kitten well-packets.

Respecting patient/client confidentiality

- Do not ask what specific condition a client or household member has.
- Educate staff to respect confidentiality and client/patient privacy.
- Whether a client self-discloses or not, be sure to maintain client/patient privacy in your clinic and in your medical records.
- Document in patient's file: "discussed prevention of zoonotic disease re: concern about immunocompromised family member", "gave Safe Pet Guidelines" or wording to this effect.
- As a legal document, the medical record should contain specific information about doctor client communication. You may want to seek legal advice from your clinic's attorney about specific wording you should use.

How to listen and what to say

- Use wording that the client can understand
- Address clients using their name
- Use eye contact and appropriate gestures.
- Let clients finish their introductory remarks.
- Solicit client understanding and participation.
- Ask clients if they have any questions
- A follow up phone call a few days later is always appreciated

Use empathy

Empathy is vital to client understanding, satisfaction and compliance. In a recent study, only 7% of veterinarian to client communication contained empathetic statements. Using empathetic statements acknowledges a client's emotions and feelings while maintaining objectivity. Use statements such as:

- "I see this is distressing for you"
- "It sounds like you ..."
- "This must make you feel..."

A teamwork approach

• Community liaison

- Be willing to talk to your client's health care provider(s) if needed.
- Discuss with your colleagues different ways to approach these situations.
- Consider working with local nonprofit groups such as animal welfare organizations

• Staff education

- Remind staff to respect client/patient privacy at staff meetings.
- Educate staff on reducing the risk of acquiring zoonotic disease at the clinic.
- Lead by example: model good hygiene, be inclusive and approachable to staff and clients

SAMPLE NEW CLIENT REGISTRATION FORM

Client Information:

First Name _____ Last Name _____
Street/PO Box _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Home Phone _____ Cell Phone _____ Work Phone _____
Spouse/Partner/Co-owner _____ Work/Cell Phone _____
Best Daytime Emergency Phone _____
Email Address _____

Patient (Pet) Information:

Pet's Name _____ Cat _____ Dog _____ Other _____
Breed _____ Male ___ Female ___ Neutered/Spayed? YES NO
Age _____ Birthday _____ Color _____
Diet _____ Supplements _____
Describe any exercise routine your pet is on _____
Indoor/outdoor pet (or both)? _____ If indoors, does your pet **ever** go outside? _____
Date of last vaccination _____ Which vaccines were given? _____
Ever dewormed? _____ Date last dewormed _____ Product used _____
Travel history outside the greater Bay Area? List where and dates _____

List all current medications and frequency _____

Past surgeries (please list dates & procedures) _____
Any allergies (please list) _____
Adverse reaction to any medications (if yes, list) _____
What do you use for flea control? _____ How often? _____
On heartworm preventive? _____ Product used _____ How often? _____
What problem bothers your pet the most? _____
What health problem(s) concern you the most? _____

Other Household Information:

Number of people in household _____
Number of other pets in household _____ List species and ages _____

What chemicals are routinely used in the yard or house? _____

Everyone with pets should be aware that some infectious diseases can be transmitted from animals to people (zoonoses). An immunocompromised person is at increased risk of acquiring certain zoonotic diseases from animals. People can be immunocompromised due to the following: chronic/infectious disease, organ transplant, pregnancy, radiation or chemotherapy, or those who are elderly or infants.

We would like to provide you with information to keep your pet(s) healthy if your pet is in frequent contact with someone who is immunocompromised.

yes no Please indicate if you would like to discuss this with the veterinarian today.

Is there anything else that you would like us to know about you or your pet(s)?

