



PRESS RELEASE for National Zoonosis Day

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 29, 2026
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Be Aware of Diseases Spread From Animals

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Why Zoonosis Awareness Matters

It seems that nearly every day of the year is devoted to a special cause or topic. For example, July 14 is National Shark Awareness Day. Fortunately, sharks are not a major concern here in New England. One observance that deserves attention every day, however, is National Zoonosis Day on July 6. Zoonosis is a disease that can spread between animals and people.

How Zoonotic Diseases Spread

Zoonotic diseases are caused by harmful germs, including viruses such as Rabies, bacteria including Salmonella and Leptospirosis, parasites such as roundworms, and fungi such as 'ringworm'. These germs can make both animals and people sick, with illnesses ranging from mild to severe and, in some cases, even fatal. Animals may sometimes appear healthy while still carrying germs that can infect others. People can become infected in many ways, including direct contact with an infected animal's bodily fluids, such as saliva, blood, urine, feces, or mucus, through petting, scratches, or bites. Contact with places where animals live and roam, or with contaminated objects and surfaces such as tank water, pet habitats, chicken coops, barns, plants, soil, and food or water dishes. Bites from ticks or insects. Eating contaminated food or drinking contaminated milk or contact with water contaminated by the feces of an infected animal. A few examples of zoonotic diseases include Rabies, Salmonella, Leptospirosis, roundworms, and ringworm (a fungal disease).

Rabies: A Serious Example

Rabies is a serious example of a zoonotic disease. It is a virus that can spread from wild mammals to pets and people through the bite of an infected animal. Rabies is always fatal in unvaccinated animals and humans, which is why Vermont law requires pets to be vaccinated. This includes indoor-only cats, since they may get outside unexpectedly or encounter a bat that has entered the home.

In Vermont, the wild animals most associated with rabies are raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes. Warning signs in wildlife may include aggression, circling, confusion, or unusual daytime activity. However, seeing a nocturnal animal out during the day does not

automatically mean it has rabies; some animals may simply be searching for food for themselves or their young.

To help prevent rabies in wildlife, wildlife professionals distribute more than 10 million oral vaccine baits each year. You can help by observing wildlife from a distance, vaccinating your animals, and staying alert for animals showing abnormal behavior. Report unknown or strangely behaving animals to your town's animal control officer. If the animal is wild, contact the Rabies Hotline (**1-800-4-RABIES** [1-800-472-2437] or 1-802-223-8690) or your town's game warden.

Everyday Prevention Tips

People can encounter animals in many places, both at home and away from home, including petting zoos, fairs, schools, stores, and parks. Insects such as mosquitoes and fleas, as well as ticks, can also spread disease to people and animals. So talk to your veterinarian about which flea/tick/heartworm/intestinal parasite preventative is best for your pet. Simple daily habits can also greatly reduce your risk.

The single most important thing you can do is keep your hands clean. Wash your hands after being around animals, even if they appear healthy and you did not touch them. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer, then wash with soap and water as soon as you can because hand sanitizer does not eliminate all germs. Wash your hands after visiting petting zoos, fairs, childcare settings, schools, or farms. Clean your shoes after visiting farms to help prevent the spread of disease: Remember that germs can travel on clothing and shoes. Avoid rough play with dogs and cats using your hands; instead, throw toys or use wand-style teaser toys to reduce scratches and bites

Enjoy Animals Safely

Zoonotic diseases should not stop you from enjoying your pets or appreciating wildlife. The key is knowledge and prevention. Keep your distance from wildlife, report suspicious animal behavior, keep your pets current on rabies vaccinations and flea, tick, and heartworm prevention, avoid bites and scratches, cook food thoroughly, avoid raw meat, and wash your hands often. For more information about zoonotic diseases and prevention, visit the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association education center at vtvets.org.