Animal Lovers Beware: Pets Can Pass Illnesses to Their Owners

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If your family is among the 62 percent of American households that owns a pet, read on. Health researchers warn that our animal friends can pass along almost 20 different diseases to us, and medical professionals in the United States may not be adequately addressing the risk of these infections, says a new review published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal and reported by fierceanimalhealth.com.

For the study, scientists reviewed 500 studies of zoonotic diseases—illnesses passed from animals to humans—conducted during the past few decades. Researchers found some of the diseases most commonly spread from animal to humans were antibiotic-resistant strains of MRSA, roundworms (commonly passed by dogs and cats), and Salmonella and E. coli (spread by amphibians, rodents, birds and reptiles).

During the extensive review, researchers also discovered that doctors rarely asked their patients about their pets. “There hasn’t been a great dialogue between the veterinary community, the human health community and the public,” Jason Stull, VMD, PhD, an assistant professor of veterinary preventive medicine at the Ohio State University and the study’s lead author, told NPR. “People don’t even think of their pets as a possible source of disease.”

Stull suggested pet-lovers contact vets and doctors to chat about any health problems in the home before they choose a critter to join their family. In addition, for those who have health issues and already own pets, Stull advised using two simple ways to reduce their risk of contracting a zoonotic disease: Wash your hands every time after handling an animal, and make sure to wear protective gloves while cleaning out their enclosures.

Pets can do a lot of good for humans’ mental, physical and emotional health. For more information, click here.

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http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/zoonotic-diseases-pets-27133-9057