

## HIDDEN DANGERS OF THE PET WORLD

Working in the animal industry is extremely rewarding, however, it can come with its fair share of challenges and risks. We are all aware of dealing with a pet's lack of training, exuberance, and sometimes just an off day in which they don't want to cooperate. We are also used to interacting with clients with similar issues, but sometimes we overlook the problems that are not as obvious or the hidden dangers.

These hidden hazards are the zoonotic diseases or parasites we can contract from the pets we work with. When people talk about zoonotic diseases, typically rabies is the common one that comes up. However, rabies is not one that most of us are faced with on a regular basis, because by law a majority of pets have been vaccinated. Though, if you are bitten by a rabid animal, it is a frightening disease. The virus will move up the nerves and eventually go to the brain. If not vaccinated right after the bite, rabies is fatal in almost 100% of all cases in humans.

Most of the things we may contract are more subtle than an obvious bite, which tends to make us complacent in our precautionary procedures. A common misconception is the belief that shampoo actually kills everything bad during the bath. Shampoo is for cleaning, but it is not a great disinfectant. The good news is that we can get some benefit from the "solution to pollution is dilution" which might dilute the bad bugs so there isn't as many, but the bad news is that some will still remain. We need to be aware that if there are open wounds, ear infections, oral infections, or if we come into contact with the anal region, we may be at risk of contracting a bad infection. This is especially true if you have any open wounds, which are very vulnerable to an infection.

When there is an ear infection or sores on the skin, this usually harbors a host of bacteria and fungi. Some are pretty common and may be fairly benign (common inhabitants of the skin). In an infected wound they are usually present in large numbers (over-growth). Cleaning these ears or sores without adequate protection can lead to unwanted infections of your nail beds, mouth, ears, eyes, and genital regions. Washing your hands after working with these areas can help, but not the same level of safety as gloves, waterproof gowns, and facial/eye protection. In today's world, one of the biggest concerns are the bacteria known as "super bugs" or those that are drug resistant like MRSA (methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*), MRSP (methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus pseudintermedius*), and *Pseudomonas*. These infections can be very difficult to deal with because the common antibiotics don't work. The antibiotics that do work are very strong and often hard on the kidneys and liver.

Often overlooked and one of the highest generators of bacteria and fungi is anything dealing with the anal region. Fecal material is about 90% a cocktail of different bacteria. Some are good and help in digestion, but there is always the potential for some bad ones. *Salmonella* (one that commonly causes "food poisoning") is one of the most typical ones and usually the reason for recalls on pet foods. *Salmonella* causes bloody diarrhea and can be fatal, especially in young babies when dehydration occurs rapidly. There are many other hazardous ones such as *E. coli*, *Campylobacter*, *Candida* (fungus) to name a few. All are of major concern, especially when we feed our pets uncooked food that may have been contaminated at the packing house or during processing.

How about the parasites in the intestine? Some only cause mild intestinal problems in humans, but because we are an abnormal host (different body chemistry and temperature) some migrate to other parts of our body. One of the most common parasites of our pets are round worms and in humans it is

not uncommon for those to migrate to the blood vessels of the eye or brain causing blindness or even mental issues in the children.

In the pet field, we also deal with external parasites. Fleas and ticks are two that most of us are very familiar with. They often carry diseases that can be anywhere from mild to very fatal (like the bubonic plague). Then there are the mites, which typically just cause skin irritation like Cheyletiella (walking dandruff or rabbit fur mite). These are often missed by human dermatologists because they don't realize that we have such a high exposure potential relative to the normal population. Who are the first in line for itchy dogs? Groomers and veterinarians!

Although, these diseases and parasites can be very scary and gross, most of them are VERY preventable with common sense, good observation, and correct protective gear. The most crucial point is to not underestimate the risk of contracting one. Prevention starts as soon as a pet walks in the door (or better yet on the call for the appointment). Ask pertinent questions, listen to the possibilities that may present a problem, and check out the pet BEFORE you take them in for the day. When in doubt, better to refuse the groom and refer them to the veterinarian than to get sick. A common excuse is, "I don't have time to do that because I am very busy!" Is it better to make a little time or possibly miss work because you are sick at home, in the hospital, or heaven forbid dead? Something to think about. Your chances may be one in a million, but if you are that one, then the consequences can be severe.