

## Links

*Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Center*

*Wildlife Health Copies:*

[www.ccwhc.ca/wildlife\\_health\\_topics.php](http://www.ccwhc.ca/wildlife_health_topics.php)

For more information, please contact the Animal Health Division.

Other information pamphlets are available online from the Department of Natural Resources at:

[www.nr.gov.nl.ca/agric/](http://www.nr.gov.nl.ca/agric/)

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# Health Risks from Handling Animals: Hunters & Trappers



## Introduction

All animals carry diseases. In most cases, these diseases are only a health threat to other animals of the same kind. In some cases, however, these diseases can spread to humans, resulting in problems ranging from annoyance or slight discomfort to life threatening illnesses. A disease that spreads from animals to humans is called a **zoonosis** (plural **zoonoses**). In Canada, due to a cooler northern climate and well-developed health care and education system, the number of zoonoses that exist is not nearly as high as those in more tropical countries.

This pamphlet is the second in a series that looks at common zoonoses. The others in this series include *“Health Risks from Handling Animals: Livestock Owners;”* *“Health Risks from Handling Animals: General Public”* and *“Health Risks from Handling Animals: Livestock Fairs.”* In addition, there are pamphlets available on certain specific diseases.

## Sources of Infection

The two common sources of infection when dealing with animals are from 1) contact with animals and 2) consuming food products made from animal sources (such as milk, meat or contaminated water). These second “food-borne illnesses” will only be briefly covered in this pamphlet.

The types of contact with animals can be 1) direct, as in the bite from an

infected animal (such as rabies) or touching an animal infected with ringworm; or it can be 2) indirect, where the person contacts infected body fluids (urine or saliva), manure, or inhales infectious organisms in the air.

## Examples of Zoonoses

Almost every type of animal has a list of diseases that it carries which may infect humans. Those commonly known to exist in Newfoundland include (\* indicates that a separate pamphlet is available):

Animal	Disease	Means of spreading	Symptoms	Comments
All fur-bearing animals	Rabies*	Bite from a sick animal.	Fatal infection of the brain.	Seen in 4 - 5 year cycles in foxes in Labrador, very rarely seen in bats. Found on Island of Newfoundland in 1988, 1989, & 2002/03. Of increasing importance in the Maritimes.
Deer Mice	Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome*	Inhaling contaminated dust.	Pneumonia	No human cases in Newfoundland, found in deer mice. Possible risk in cabins infested with these mice.
Wolves & Dogs	Hydatid Disease*	Contact with contaminated fur.	Usually a silent infection, symptoms if cyst forms in sensitive part of the body.	Exists in Labrador.
Beavers, Rabbits, & Muskrat	Tularemia	Contact with contaminated carcasses or organs, sometimes after a knife cut when dressing carcasses.	Ulcer on hand where contact made, swollen or painful lymph nodes.	Infected animals often have spots on liver and other organs. Two human deaths in Quebec in the year 2000.
Beavers & other wild & domestic animals	Giardiasis (Beaver Fever)	Drinking contaminated water (rivers, ponds, sometimes in municipal reservoirs).	Diarrhea	Common reason for boil orders in municipalities with contamination of water inlets. Sources of contamination can be human or animal feces.
Rabbits	Yersiniosis	Contact with carcass of infected animals.	Diarrhea	Infected animals often have spots on liver and other organs.
Bears, Seals, Walrus	Trichinosis	Eating under-cooked meat.	Sudden muscle cramps.	Exists in Labrador.

## Minimizing the Risks of Illness

Depending on the disease, the actual ways of avoiding infection vary. However, general recommendations are:

1. Avoid contacting or handling sick animals;
2. Wear gloves when handling carcasses;
3. Wash hands regularly;
4. Avoid hand-mouth contact (such as smoking or eating) when handling furs and carcasses;
5. Wash any wounds received when handling carcasses and report to health officials if cuts are serious;
6. Cook all meats before eating; and
7. Boil water from rivers or ponds before drinking

Please also report all sightings of sick wildlife to Conservation Officers.

For more information on human diseases or if you have any illness, please contact your family doctor or Community Health office. In addition, pamphlets are available on:

- 1) **Rabies in Newfoundland & Labrador**
- 2) **Rabies in Labrador**
- 3) **Hantavirus in Deer Mice**
- 4) **Keep Your Cabin Free of Rodents**
- 5) **Parasites of Caribou: Tapeworm Cysts**
- 6) **Diseases of Moose: Tapeworm Cysts**

These can be obtained on-line or by contacting the Animal Health Division.