



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 and Labrador
- 2) Rabies in Labrador
- 3) Bat Rabies in Newfoundland and Labrador
- 4) World Rabies Day (2009)
- 5) Q-fever in Goats
- 6) Hantavirus in Deer Mice
- 7) Keep Your Cabins Free of Rodents
- 8) Salmonella in Songbirds
- 9) Contagious Ecthyma (ORF) in sheep & Goats

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

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/

Publication: DS 08-003
Last Revised: March 2010



Health Risks from Handling Animals: General Public



Department of Natural Resources
Animal Health Division
P.O. Box 7400
St. John's, NL
A1E 3Y5

t 709.729.6879
f 709.729.0055

animalhealthdivision@gov.nl.ca

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 other areas of the world.

This pamphlet is the third 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): Hunters & Trappers”* and *“Health Risks from Handling Animals): Livestock Fairs.”* In addition, there are also 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 not be covered here. There are also diseases spread by arthropods such as Lyme disease (ticks) and West Nile virus (mosquitoes) which are dealt with in other pamphlets.

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 in bats.
Deer mice	Hantavirus* Pulmonary Syndrome	Inhaling contaminated dust	Pneumonia	No human cases in Newfoundland. Possible risk in cabins infected with these mice.
Beavers and other wild & domestic animals	Giardiasis (Beaver Fever)	Drinking contaminated waters (rivers, ponds, sometimes in municipal reservoirs)	Diarrhea	Common reason for boil orders in municipalities with contamination of water inlets. Contamination may be by human or animal feces.
Pet birds	Psittacosis	Inhaling feather or fecal dust	Pneumonia	Relatively common in pet birds, human cases are rare.
Wild birds	Salmonellosis*	Handling carcasses of dead birds, cleaning out infected bird feeders	Diarrhea	Occasional outbreaks in songbirds. Human infection is rare. Common sense approach to handling carcasses and cleaning feeders.
Turtles	Salmonellosis	Handling turtles or cleaning out dirty cages	Diarrhea	Across North America, some areas banned the sale of turtles especially those kept in water.
Dogs & Cats	Visceral larva migrans	Hand-mouth contact in children after touching pets or contaminated objects (soil, sand)	Pneumonia, abdominal pain, rash	Caused by a parasite of puppies & kittens passed in their feces. Most often in children that contact contaminated objects or put dirt in their mouths, also can be picked up in sandboxes used by cats.
Poultry and most other animals	Salmonellosis	Hand-mouth contact	Diarrhea	Hand-mouth contact should be avoided. Eating or smoking while close to animals is discouraged as it also promotes hand-mouth contact.
Cattle, sheep, & goats	<i>E. coli</i> infection	Hand-mouth contact	Diarrhea, sometimes bloody, may be very severe (as in <i>E. coli</i> O157:H7)	Same as above.
Sheep & goats	Q-fever*	Inhaling infected dust or contacting by hand	Headache, fever, weakness, sometimes pneumonia	Same as above. If dust is generated when working with these animals, respiratory protection may be necessary.
Sheep & goats	Orf (Contagious Ecthyma)*	Hand or other direct contact	Blisters that burst and become scabbed	First signs 3-7 days after contact. Report to family doctor
Most animals	Ringworm	Hand contact	Itchy, red, dry, scaly circular patches on skin. On animals, they often appear as crusty, bald patches.	Caution when handling animals. Report concerns to family doctor.

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

Those zoonoses known to exist in Newfoundland and Labrador of potential concern to the general public are listed in the table to the left (* indicates that a separate pamphlet is available).

Minimizing the Risks of Illness

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

1. Avoid contacting animals that are obviously sick;
2. Wash hands regularly and use hand sanitizer after contact with animals;
3. Avoid hand-mouth contact (such as eating) when contacting animals;
4. Wash any wounds received when contacting animals;
5. Keep sandboxes covered when not in use; and
6. Report any health concerns to your doctor or community health official

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