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***"Zoonosis" –can your puppy or dog
transmit diseases to you?***

Diseases passed from animals to man are called zoonosis or zoonotic illnesses.

A serious statement –but yes you and your family can be infected by your dog.

Yep - we derive a lot of joy and solace from our dogs.

They are our non-judgmental companions that give unqualified love and quality companionship and protection and out watch dogs in general.

It is quite readily accepted that sharing your life and world with a puppy or dog is a good thing -everyone benefits from the love, affection, and responsibilities that are shared.

There is a bond that develops through life with your canine companion, one that is not shared with anyone else—a spiritual connection.

However, on occasion, they can give us germs and parasites that make us ill.

Because of good hygiene –a working knowledge and veterinary care, animal-transmitted diseases are rare.

And, quite frequently the threat of these diseases, because they are unknown or misunderstood is somewhat exaggerated—but still a possibility.

Living life to the fullest has its risks but a little caution on your part is all that is required.

Toxoplasmosis.

Toxoplasmosis is a real disease and one that is generally associated with cats and their litter box –cat stool in the yard and our and our dogs relationship that the box or stool.

Toxoplasmosis is caused by *Toxoplasma gondii*, a small single-celled protozoan.

The complete life cycle of toxoplasmosis occurs only in cats.

These felines become infected by preying on infected birds and rodents.

Most cats show no symptoms of disease.

In these cats, the organism lives within the cells that line the small intestine.

Cats are the only animals that shed this ineffective stage of this protozoan called an oocyst.

Most exposures of humans to oocysts cause no overt disease.

In a small percentage, however, the oocysts proliferates in many organs of the body causing fever, malaise, enlarged lymph nodes, headache, sore throat and muscle pain.

In severe cases the central nervous system, eyes and liver become inflamed.

Good hygiene habits that include proper hand washing and cleaning the box and cat droppings regularly help to avoid this problem—make it impossible for your dog to eat the cat's feces —keep young children away from the cat box.

Eating raw or poorly cooked meat of an infected animal is another way this disease is passed on to man.

If a woman becomes infected during the latter two thirds of pregnancy toxoplasmosis may cause severe foetal abnormalities.

This is why obstetricians suggest pregnant women not to change cat litter boxes.

What have this to do with your dog?

However, the toxoplasmosis illness can also originate in handling raw or undercooked meats that may be a part of your dog's regular diet.

Dogs eat almost anything and will eat the cat's faeces.

Be sure that you bleach the work surface after handling the meats, store them properly, and do not contaminate cooked product with raw.

Ringworm.

Ringworm is not a worm it's a fungus and is not always ring-shaped.

Ringworm is another insidious parasite that plagues dogs if they have been exposed to massive infestation of flea and tick problems.

After scratching themselves, the areas may become infected with the parasite from the saliva and interaction of the flea saliva with the dog's incessant scratching.

This illness is highly contagious and should be treated immediately.

It manifests in areas that are round, and have a very distinctive pattern to them.

It takes specific medications to cure the problem and may take a concerted amount of time to clear completely.

It is a slow growing fungus that feeds on dead skin cells and hair of all species of mammal - yep also humans.

The most common one "Microsporum canis", is common on juvenile dogs where it appears as a dry, oval, scurfy patch of broken off hair. Many of these lesions glow brightly under ultraviolet light.

The spores of these fungi often contaminate brushes and cloth that have been in touch with the pet.

If these spores come in contact with abraded skin, the fungal infection may transfer to the pet owner.

Hookworms and roundworms.

Hookworms and roundworms (*Ancylostoma* and *Ascaris*) are common nematodes of dogs and cats.

When a human accidentally eats something contaminated with worm eggs from a pet's stool or worm dropping (this disease occurs most often in children due to their poor hygienic practices – small children dropping foodstuff and picking it up to eat) the eggs ingested will hatch in the intestines and begin migrating throughout that person's body. Worm larva can also burrow through intact skin–yep horrified as it might sound.

Because these parasites were designed to live in dogs and cats, they become lost in the human body –often in the liver or eyes.

When this occurs, the disease is called "visceral larval migrans".

In the eye the larval nematodes cause inflammation and could cause blindness.

In the liver they can cause chills, fever, malaise and an elevated white blood cell count.

To prevent this disease, have your pet's stool checked once yearly or more often for parasites and worm regularly throughout the year.

Tapeworms.

Certain tapeworms that encyst in the muscles of pets, livestock and fish can also infect humans.

Taenia solium is carried through pork, *T. saginata* by beef and *Diphyllobothrium latum* by fish.

The common pigmy tapeworm of dogs and cats (*dipylidium*) we frequently find in dogs and cats is never infectious to people.

Besides the three tapeworms mentioned, *Echinococcus granulosa*, can infect people.

The first three develop in the human intestine while the last can cause major damage to the human brain and body organs.

Consult your doctor (Praziquantel and fenbendazole destroy these parasites).

Dog heartworms (in some areas).

Heartworm is a parasitic disease that can affect any dog regardless of age, sex or habitat.

It is not commonly found in South Africa but is a problem in some of our neighboring countries.

This means that there are a few cases diagnosed from time to time depending from where your dog originated or where your dog had visited.

This is especially a consideration if you live on the borders of our country as your dog may be at risk.

On rare occasions, dog heartworms could infect human beings.

This parasite, *Dirofilaria immitis*, is spread dog to dog by mosquitoes.

When a mosquito obtains a blood meal from an infected dog and then goes on to bite the owner it is common for some of the heartworm larva to be transferred to the human.

In a normal person, the body's immune system quickly recognizes the parasite and destroys it.

In rare instances, however, the larval heartworm manages to migrate to the person's lungs where the dying parasite stimulates an inflammatory

lesion called a "coin lesion". These lesions are not serious in themselves but they become very significant when they are misinterpreted as being lung tumours.

Protozoan diseases.

Protozoa are microscopic single-celled organisms. The vast majority of protozoa live free in the environment or as harmless inhabitants of the body but some are capable of causing disease.

Giardia.

Giardia lamblia is a small motile protozoan that inhabits the intestines of mammals and birds also in humans.

There are many strains of giardia and it is unclear how many are infectious to people.

To know is that Giardia is the most common form of non-bacterial diarrhea in people.

Children are most commonly affected. Many cases are silent with no overt symptoms.

When diarrhoea does occur, the illness normally lasts one or two weeks but chronic cases in frail people have lasted for years.

Outbreaks due to contaminated water supply occur from time to time for humans and animals alike.

Ask your doctor -Metronidazole (Flagyl) is an effective treatment in animals and man.

Cryptosporidium.

Cryptosporidium parvum causes diarrhoea in dogs, cats, rodents, young calves and people.

It is found throughout the world.

It is passed from individual to individual through faecal contamination.

We all know that by keeping a dog we have to clean dog poo and the possibility walking in some on our shoes and could come in contact with it in various scenarios.

The disease in animals and man is usually mild and self-limiting.

Signs of the disease include diarrhea, abdominal pain and flu-like

symptoms that can last up to six weeks.

The disease is more severe in very old and very young animals and people.

In immune compromised individuals it may cause chronic inflammation of the digestive tract.

The disease is passed through faecal contamination from animals or man.

The organism is quite resistant to drying and disinfectants so, it can survive a long time in contaminated waste.

Signs in people and animals besides loose watery diarrhoea include stomach cramps and mild fever.

In healthy people, symptoms last about two weeks.

Virus- Rabies.

The flagship virus that we all associate with wildlife is rabies.

Any species of warm-blooded animal is susceptible to this disease but the most common carriers are the meerkat, rats and wild and roaming dogs.

The disease is passed by a saliva-contaminated bite and from dogs if they are affected.

Occasionally the disease will leave its wildlife reservoirs and infect dogs and cattle.

Excellent vaccines exist to protect your pets from this disease talk to you vet about this.

Bacterial diseases - Salmonellosis.

Salmonella are a group of intestinal bacteria that can cause disease in animals and man.

In birds and small mammals salmonella causes diarrhea, septicemia (blood infections) and asymptomatic carrier states.

People too, like "Typhoid Mary" can carry and spread the disease without signs of disease.

Common animal carriers of these bacteria are reptiles, rats and mice (in a kennel or multiple dog in the yard situation these contaminated rodents come after food leftovers).

Raw meat feeders could be handling contaminated meats.

People with a robust immune system rarely experience more than severe cramps and diarrhea.

However in infants and people with weak immune systems the disease can be life-threatening.

Campylobacter.

Campylobacteriosis is a bacterial disease caused by *Campylobacter jejuni*, an organism that lives in the intestinal tract of many animals. The signs of this disease are diarrhea, cramping, abdominal pain and fever.

The illness typically lasts one week. It is worse in the very young and the very old.

Many infections are silent with no symptoms at all.

Most people become infected by handling or eating raw poultry.

Occasionally it is spread through contact with the waste of pet dogs and cats.

Streptococcus and Staphylococci.

These bacteria are found on all animals that typically associate with humans.

In the great majority of cases they cause no disease in the animal.

However, in pets, eye infections are occasionally associated with Streptococci and skin infections with Staphylococci.

Both bacteria can spread from pets to humans on contaminated hands and objects.

Infections are generally limited to the skin and eyes.

Helicobacter pylori.

This spiral bacterium is capable of forming ulcers in the stomachs of animals and people.

It resides in the stomach and the upper area of the small intestine called the duodenum.

We suspect that on occasion, it is spread to humans from cat's dogs and ferrets through poor sanitation.

In dogs, cats and people the most frequent sign of Helicobacter is intermittent vomiting.

Affected individuals may also become nauseous, loose their appetite, and lose weight.

Consult with your doctor or vet - Amoxicillin, metronidazole and H2 antacids such as famotidine or cimetidine cure the disease in animals and man.

Tick borne diseases.

Ticks that feed on wildlife reservoirs of diseases will sometimes transfer them to your pets.

If the ticks later leave the pet and bite the owner for their next blood meal they may transfer a number of diseases caused by bacteria, rickettsia and spirochetes.

Sarcoptic Mange or Scabies.

Mange mites are common on large and small, wild and domestic animals.

Mange mites are not particular as to the species of animal they attack.

Dog and cat mange mites are *Sarcoptes scabiei*.

Initially they are most common on the ears, face and extremities but with time the entire body becomes affected.

These mites are passed from animal to animal by direct contact.

They do not survive long off the host.

The mites burrow through the deeper layers of the skin causing intense itching and a red rash.

From this the term "seven year itch" was derived.

Consult with your vet - they are easily killed with ivermectin, special dips or Selamectin (Revolution).