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Survey Shows that Dog and Cat Owners Know Parasites Pose Risks to Pets and People but Do Little to Prevent Them

Gulf between knowledge and action revealed by nationwide survey of more than 1,000 pet owners

BEL AIR, Md. (November 14, 2006) – A September national survey of more than 1,000 dog and cat owners conducted for the nonprofit Companion Animal Parasite Council (CAPC) revealed that while many people are aware that children are especially at risk of being affected by zoonotic disease caused by the transmission of parasites to humans by pets, they appear indifferent to the risk.

More than a third of the respondents (38 percent) said children play in an area where a pet leaves waste, and 21 percent said they never remove the waste. Only 47 percent said they “always” wash their hands after contact with a pet, leaving a wide margin of opportunity for zoonotic transmission to occur.

“Children are especially vulnerable, given their close contact with pets and pet environments. They should not be allowed to play in the dirt in areas such as playgrounds and sandboxes where animals defecate. That being virtually impossible, it’s best to prevent parasites in the first place through year-round control,” said Michael Paul, DVM, executive director of CAPC.

Even though 80 percent of pet owners surveyed are aware that parasites that can make their pet sick can also be transmitted to humans, only 23 percent reported being “extremely” or “very” concerned about this happening to them.

Only 54 percent of respondents knew that fleas and ticks can be found in their house all year long, but just 29 percent are concerned about parasites “all year.”

“Taking the attitude of ‘it won’t happen to me’ puts pets and people at increased risk of contracting zoonotic disease,” said Paul. “With proper hygiene and year-round parasite management measures, pet owners can virtually eliminate the possibility.”

Many parasites – including fleas, ticks, tapeworms, roundworms, hookworms and scabies – are zoonotic, meaning animals can transmit them to humans. Find out more at www.petsandparasites.org, a Web site developed by the CAPC that includes easy, effective steps pet owners can take to keep both their animals and families healthy, including hygiene advice and other year-round parasite management tips.

About CAPC

The mission of the CAPC is to foster animal and human health, while preserving the human-animal bond, through recommendations for the diagnosis and year-round management of parasitic infections in dogs and cats. The CAPC is an independent council of veterinarians and other animal health care professionals established to create guidelines for the optimal control of internal and external parasites that threaten the health of pets and people. Its membership represents broad expertise in parasitology, human medicine, public health, veterinary law, private practice and association leadership.

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