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Nonprofit Offers Tips to Keep Dogs, Cats and People Healthy

*Taking Easy, Preventative Measures Year-Round Can Virtually Eliminate Risk of
Pets Transmitting Disease to People*

BEL AIR, Md. (February 15, 2007) – Most pet owners know that parasites can make their animals sick and that parasitic diseases can be transmitted from pets to people. What they may not know is that there are easy steps they can (and should) take all year long to virtually eliminate the risks parasites pose to animals and humans.

The nonprofit Companion Animal Parasite Council (CAPC), an organization dedicated to fostering the human-animal relationship, conducted a fall 2006 survey of more than 1,000 dog and cat owners across the country that revealed a disturbing “it-won’t-happen-to-me” attitude.

When it comes to heartworm, for example, 92 percent of survey respondents have heard of it, and 82 percent know it can be prevented. Yet even though 75 percent have a veterinarian who recommends a monthly heartworm preventative for dogs, only 31 percent use such a product for heartworms and other parasites.

“At CAPC, we work to let people know not only that risks from parasites exist, but more importantly, that there are simple ways to mitigate those risks and keep everyone healthy,” said Michael Paul, DVM, executive director of CAPC.

A year-round preventative is on the list of the top five things pet owners can do to protect their animals and families from the risks associated with the parasites that pets come into contact with

every day. Such risks exist even in cold weather, because some parasites (for example, fleas and ticks) live inside homes all year.

Top 5 Tips to Protect Your Family

1. Wash your hands well after contact with an animal.
2. Do not allow children to put dirt in their mouths.*
3. Pick up dog and cat waste from your yard daily, especially in areas where both children and animals play.
4. Cover home sandboxes to protect them from fecal contamination.*
5. Have your pet tested for parasites by a veterinarian at least once a year, and administer year-round preventive medications to control zoonotic parasites (those that can be passed from pets to people).

*People, especially children, may contract the larvae or eggs of internal parasites in dogs and cats through direct contact with infected feces or contaminated object such as soil and plants. When this happens, it's called "zoonotic" transmission, and people are said to have contracted a "zoonotic" disease.

You can find more information on parasites, parasitic disease and how to keep the canine, feline and human members of your family healthy at www.petsandparasites.org. This CAPC Web site provides general information about 10 of the most common internal and external parasites of dogs and cats. The site, which is divided into "Dog Owner" and "Cat Owner" sections, provides answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about pets, parasites and their effects on human and animal health. Pet owners also can find information about the behavioral changes and other symptoms that indicate their dog or cat may be infected by parasites.

About CAPC

The mission of the CAPC is to foster animal and human health while preserving the human-animal bond by generating and disseminating credible, accurate and timely information for the diagnosis, treatment, prevention and control of parasitic infections. 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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