

Pets and Pregnancy/Pets with Baby

Here at the Toronto Humane Society we consider our pets to be members of our family, and we hope you see your four legged companion in the same way. Far from getting in the way of your becoming a parent, responsibility for your pet may have given you a tiny preview of what life will be like once you have a little human to care for.

Please don't give up on your pet once learning you are pregnant. There may be some added precautions to take, but most human-pet blended families get on just fine.

Cats

A few cats carry a parasite known as toxoplasmosis. This parasite is shed in their feces and can cause damage to a fetus if ingested by a pregnant woman. Sounds dangerous, and it is, but transmission from your pet to you can be easily prevented by having someone else in the household change the litter while you are pregnant and by washing your hands after playing with kitty.

Another thing about toxoplasmosis that is important to note is that not having a cat does not mean you cannot become infected. Toxoplasmosis can be found in undercooked meat as well as your garden soil.

Thankfully, if you have been exposed to toxoplasmosis in the past you cannot pass on the infection to your baby. Ask your doctor about getting a test done that tells you if you have been exposed previously.

As with all pets, do not leave your cat alone with a young child. While cats do not suck the breath out of baby's lungs, a curious kitty may jump into a crib with baby to explore and then decide to hang out there because it is cozy and warm. An active toddler or young child can scare a cat into becoming defensive and could be hurt in the process. An adult must always be present if children and pets are interacting together.

Ensure your cat is dewormed by a veterinarian on a regular basis. Some of the parasites that are killed by the dewormer may have been zoonotic, meaning they could be passed from people to animals. While cases of this occurring are very rare these days, it is better to completely prevent the possibility with a quick visit to vet once or twice a year

Dogs

As with cats it is important that your dog is never left alone with a child, and is dewormed regularly to prevent parasite infections.

Before you are pregnant, or in the early stages of pregnancy you need to invest in obedience lessons if your dog's manners and listening skills are not quite where you need them to be. You need to be able to control your dog easily once you are heavily pregnant and must ensure that an enthusiastic greeting does not mean pouncing onto your stomach. Once you have baby having a dog that 'sits' and 'stays' until released and knows what 'leave it' means will make a huge difference.

Dogs are often sensitive creatures, and they can resent not being the center of attention. Because you know that baby is going to be taking up a fair portion of your time in the near future, plan for this in advance. Is there someone else in the family that can devote extra time to the pooch? Can you hire a doggy daycare or a dogwalker to assist with releasing some of your pup's energy?

Get your dog used to the idea of having a new pack member. Show them the baby's room and supplies before your little one arrives so the change is a gradual one. If you can, have your dog spend some time socializing with young children before you have one so they aren't freaked out miniature humans.

Birds

Some birds can carry bacteria such as salmonella and campylobacter, but generally if your bird is in good health you have nothing to worry about. Taking your avian companion to the vet once you learn you are pregnant is a good idea, and as an added precaution you can have a family member take over cage cleaning duties if this was once your area of domestic bliss.

Reptiles

Some reptiles and many turtles carry salmonella. Your doctor may advise that you not care for a turtle or reptile while you are pregnant. Should you have a cold-blooded companion in your home already be extra careful with sanitation. Wash your hands thoroughly after touching your pet or its tank. Do not keep or bring your pet into the kitchen area or wash the tank in the kitchen sink.

Rats, mice, hamsters, guinea pigs

Can, rarely, carry a virus known as Lymphocytic Choriomeningitis which causes miscarriages. This can only be contracted if your pet has come into contact with a wild rodent carrier. Some doctors may advise that you do not care for a rodent while you are pregnant.