

Caring for Your Pet

Germs and Your Pet

Pets can be a great source of joy, laughter, excitement, and unconditional love. For some owners, pets are considered a part of the family. Studies have shown that pets can reduce stress and anxiety, and can help improve your overall mood.

Normally, your immune system makes sure that germs carried by your pet do not make you sick, but when you are undergoing chemotherapy, your immune system is weaker than usual. During this time, there are a few things to consider when caring for your pet.

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These steps may help prevent germs carried by your pet from entering your body through scratches on your skin or through contact with your mouth (either directly or indirectly from your hands).

- Protect your skin from direct contact with pet bodily waste (urine or feces) by wearing vinyl or household cleaning gloves when cleaning up after your pet. Wash your hands immediately afterwards.
- Cover your hand with a plastic bag or vinyl or household cleaning glove to pick up waste when walking your dog and wash your hands thoroughly as soon as you return home.
- Keep your cat's litter box away from eating areas. If possible, have someone else change the litter pan. If you must change the litter, wear vinyl or household cleaning gloves, and wash your hands immediately afterwards.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after playing with or caring for pets, especially before eating or handling food.
- Avoid being scratched or bitten by your pet. If you do get scratched or bitten, immediately wash the wounds well with soap and water.
- Stop your pet from licking your mouth or any open cuts or wounds you may have.
- Keep your pet clean and take your pet to the veterinarian for regular check-ups and vaccinations.

Are there certain days I'm more at risk than others?

During your nadir, the period of time beginning about 7–12 days after you finish each chemotherapy dose—and possibly lasting for 5–7 days—is when you may be at the greatest risk for infection. During this time, try to avoid cleaning up after your pet by asking a friend or relative to take over these chores