



Family Pets

Should You or Shouldn't You?

New babies and pets don't always mix. Even an animal that's lived in your home long before the new baby may become a danger. Young children often haphazardly grab whatever's closest to them and many animals can't tell the difference between playfulness and attack. If you're thinking about getting a new pet or wondering whether to keep the old one, there's a lot to consider.

Choosing a Pet

Pets can offer unconditional love, devotion and companionship. They can teach children responsibility and give them the opportunity to take care of another being. Here are some tips to keep in mind when selecting a pet:

- Low-maintenance pets such as guinea pigs, rats, rabbits and hamsters may be best for smaller children.
- Guinea pigs are fairly docile and rarely bite.
- Rats are smart and rarely bite.
- According to some reports, dog breeds that may be too aggressive for children include Rottweilers, pit bulls, chows, sharpeis, Dalmatians and cocker spaniels.

Hygiene

- Keep pet food and pet waste out of baby's reach.
- Always wash your baby's hands after he touches any pets, pet toys, pet food or pet dishes.
- Fish tanks are unhygienic, and children should not be allowed to touch the water.

Dangers and Diseases

- Never leave a baby or young child alone with any animal. Dogs and even snakes have been known to attack and kill babies or young children. Dogs who have been in the family

longer than the baby can be unexpectedly and even dangerously jealous. Watch for warning signs such as the dog always wanting attention when you're holding the baby.

- Cats like sleeping in the crib with a warm baby. Aside from hygiene, a cat can get on a baby's face and smother her.
- Dogs vary in their tolerance for mauling from children. Some will put up with anything; others will snap.
- A severe scratch, a deep bite or a single tooth puncture whose bottom you can't see should be seen by a doctor immediately. For minor bites and scratches, wash with cold water and apply a dry bandage. Check the next day for redness or signs of infection.
- It's possible to contract diseases and ailments from animals. Always vaccinate all pets.
- Keep your pets free of fleas and worms.
- Various skin and parasitic problems can be caught from pets.

Ringworm, which appears on a person's skin as circular or oval areas with tiny bumps and round edges, is a fungus infection which can be caught from animals. Have your pets checked by a veterinarian.

- Reptiles, such as turtles and lizards, carry the salmonella bacteria inside their bodies. It's sometimes shed through their feces and is contagious to humans. Always wash your hands and your baby's after handling any reptile.
- Children who are scratched or bitten by cats are at risk for cat scratch fever. If the scratch or bite is slow to heal or if after a few weeks the surrounding lymph nodes swell, treatment with antibiotics may be required.
- Cat feces can contain a parasite that causes a disease in humans called toxoplasmosis. It causes mild flulike symptoms in adults and can affect a developing fetus. Some birds and other animals can carry the disease.
- Small animals should not be given to small children to hold. Let the child watch and stroke them while someone else does the holding.
- Allergies to some types of pets, especially cats, are fairly common. To make sure your child is not allergic to the type of pet you're considering, visit a family who has the pet and watch for allergic reactions.

