

Paws and Precautions: Infection Prevention and Control Considerations for Therapy Animals in Healthcare

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Objectives

- Explain best practices for animal grooming, health screening, and handler expectations.
- Describe potential zoonotic pathogens, including antimicrobial-resistant bacteria.
- Recognize transmission pathways between animals, patients, and the healthcare environment.

About therapy animal programs

Definitions

- Animal-assisted intervention
- Animal-assisted activity
- Animal-assisted therapy
- Service animal
- Resident animals
- Personal Pet

Source:

AVMA. <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/avma-policies/animal-assisted-interventions-definitions>

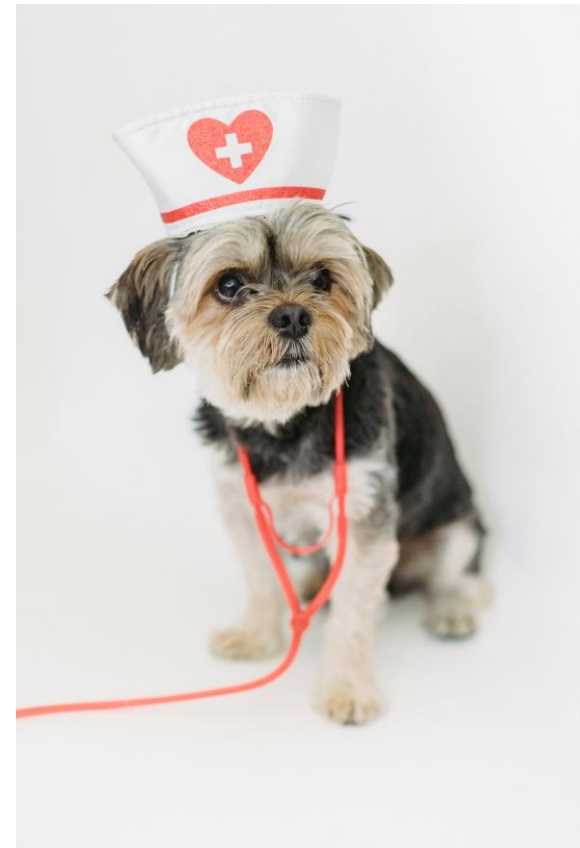


Image: Pexels

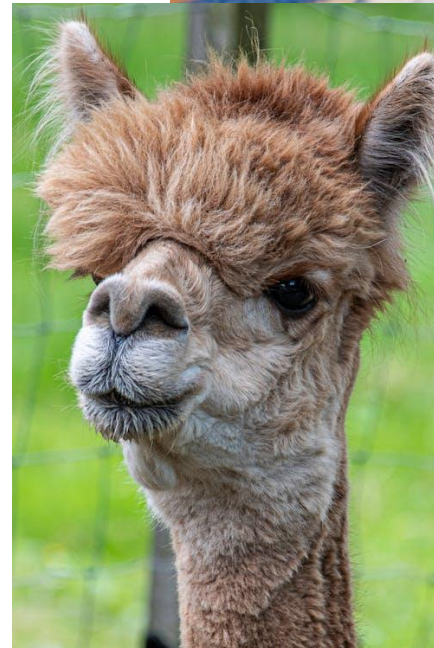
Patient impact



- Benefits for pediatric through geriatric patients
- Manage anxiety and depression
- Increase engagement in therapy
- Reduce pain

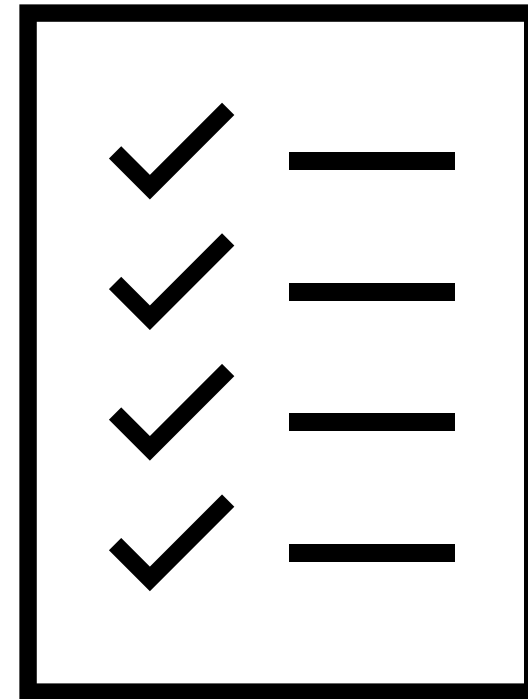
Animal species

- Dogs
- Cats
- Horses
- Rabbits
- Guinea pigs
- Rats
- Birds
- Miniature pigs
- Llamas and alpacas



Minimum criteria

- Animal = minimum of 1-2 years of age
- With owner > 6 months
- Well-mannered
- Housebroken
- Formal certification



Training



- Formal coursework
- Trainers trained to recognize subtle signs of stress
- Evaluation
- Appropriate gear
 - Leash, collars, harness

Animal care

- Routine veterinary care
 - No chronic/acute illness
 - Up-to-date on vaccinations
- Bathed before service
- Nails trimmed
- Fresh breath
- No raw pet food or treats!
- Negative fecal culture?



Handler Responsibilities

- Training
- Grooming
- Follow site and therapy animal protocols, observing whichever is more conservative
- Protect animal from stress and harm



“Doing no harm while doing good”

- 2-hr maximum visiting time (24-hr period)
- Routine veterinary care
- Protection of personal space of the animal

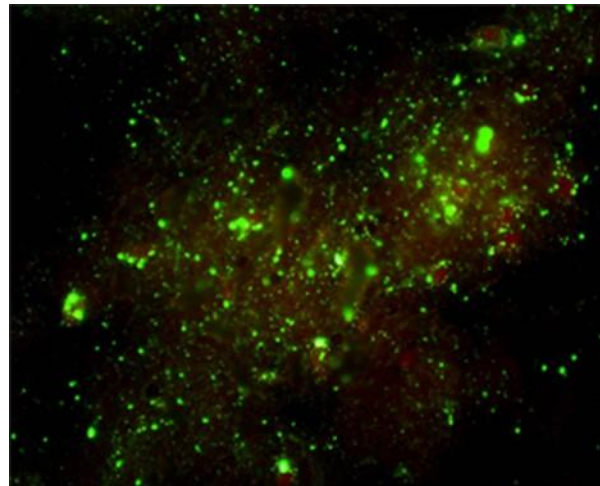


<https://petpartners.org/doing-no-harm-while-doing-good-how-pet-partners-protects-the-well-being-of-therapy-animals/>

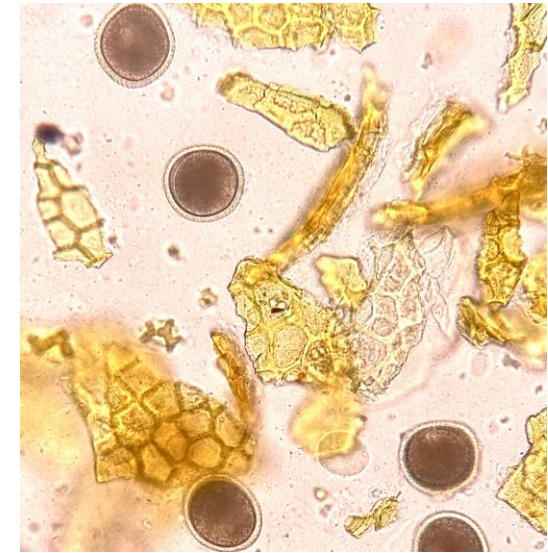
Antimicrobial resistance and zoonotic disease risks

Zoonotic pathogens (viruses and parasites)

- Viruses
 - Lymphatic choriomeningitis
 - Rabies
 - Highly pathogenic avian influenza
- Parasites
 - Hookworm
 - *Cryptosporidium* spp.
 - *Giardia lamblia*
 - *Toxocara* spp.
 - *Toxoplasma gondii*



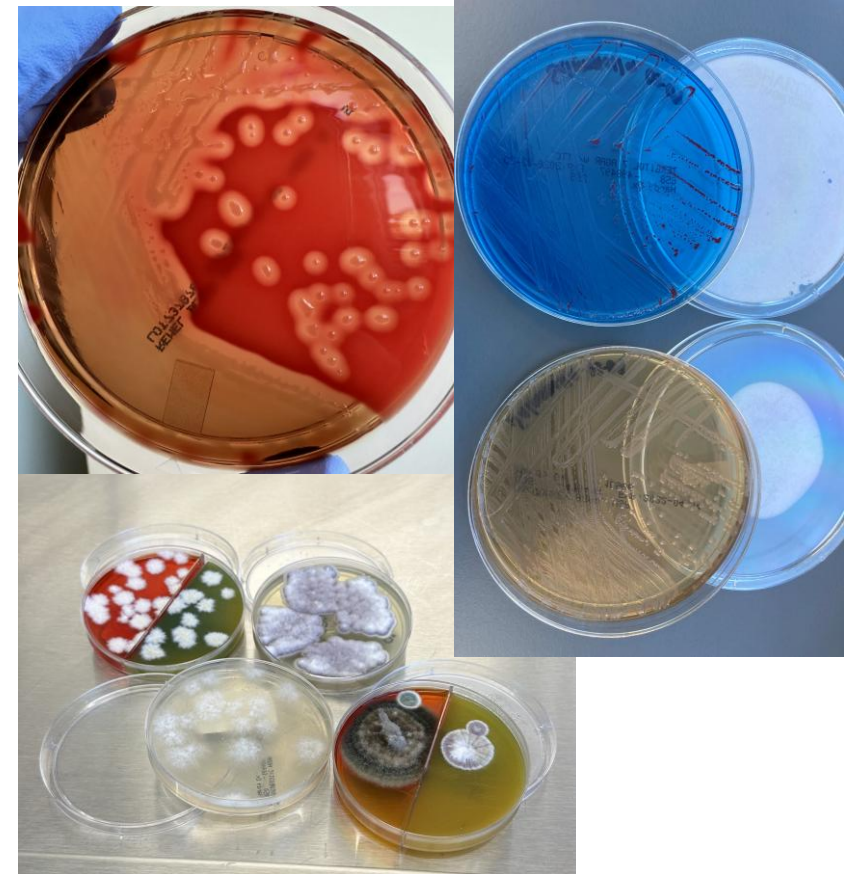
Rabies (Public Health Image Library)



Toxocara spp., S. Gefroh

Zoonotic pathogens (bacteria and fungi)

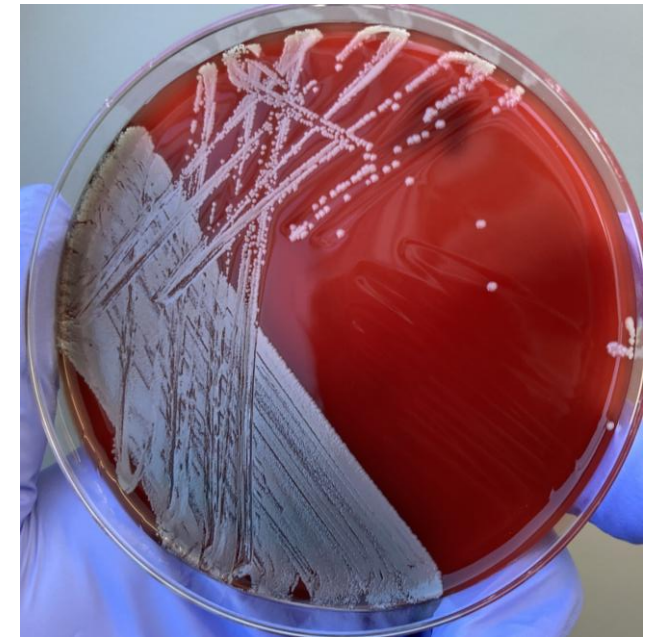
- Bacteria
 - *Campylobacter* spp.
 - *Bartonella henselae*
 - *Chlamydia psittaci*
 - *Streptobacillus moniliformis*
 - *Streptococcus pneumoniae*
 - *Pasteurella* species
 - *Salmonella*
 - *Capnocytophaga canimorsus*
- Fungi
 - *Blastomyces* spp.
 - Dermatophytes (ringworm)
 - *Malassezia pachydermatis*



Left: *Streptococcus equi*, Dermatophytes, *S. Gefroh*
Right: *Salmonella* spp., K. Maddock

Antimicrobial resistant pathogens

- Shared commensal and environmental flora
 - *Staphylococcus pseudintermedius*
 - *Staphylococcus aureus*
 - *Klebsiella pneumoniae*
 - *E. coli*
 - *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*
 - *Clostridioides difficile*



S. pseudintermedius, S. Gefroh

The literature

- Higher incidence of MRSA carriage
- Carriage by animal assessed, not transmission events (human, environment)

Risks Associated with Animal-Assisted Intervention Programs: A Literature Review

[Kathryn R Dalton](#)¹, [Kaitlin B Waite](#)¹, [Kathy Ruble](#)², [Karen C Carroll](#)³, [Alexandra DeLone](#)², [Pam Frankenfield](#)², [James A Serpell](#)⁴, [Roland J Thorpe Jr](#)⁵, [Daniel O Morris](#)⁴, [Jacqueline Agnew](#)¹, [Ronald C Rubenstein](#)^{6,7}, [Meghan F Davis](#)^{1,8}

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PMCID: PMC7673300 NIHMSID: NIHMS1579154 PMID: [32379677](#)

Raw pet food

- Risk of handling
- Risk of fecal shedding
- Microbes:
 - *Salmonella*
 - *Listeria monocytogenes*
 - *Campylobacter*
 - Diarrheagenic *Escherichia coli*
 - Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI)

► [Commun Med \(Lond\)](#). 2025 Jun 4;5:214. doi: [10.1038/s43856-025-00919-2](https://doi.org/10.1038/s43856-025-00919-2)

Dogs fed raw meat-based diets are vectors of drug-resistant *Salmonella* infection in humans

[Isabelle Bernaquez](#)^{1,2}, [Jeannot Dumaresq](#)^{3,4}, [Isabelle Picard](#)⁵, [Colette Gaulin](#)⁶, [Réjean Dion](#)^{1,7}, [Kim Weaver](#)⁵, [Matthew Walker](#)⁸, [Ashley Kearney](#)⁸, [Amrita Bharat](#)^{8,9}, [Judith Fafard](#)^{1,2}, [Sadjia Bekal](#)^{1,2}

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PMCID: PMC12137576 PMID: [40467866](#)

8 | [Editor's Pick](#) | [Virology](#) | [Case Report](#) | 12 September 2025



Highly pathogenic avian influenza A H5N1 virus infection in an immunocompromised domestic cat

[i](#) This article is commented on. [VIEW COMMENTARY](#)

Authors: [Chi Chen](#), [Akhila Naru](#), [Vineetha Reddy Mareddy](#), [Saraswathi Lanka](#), [Colleen Olmstead](#), [Vanessa Revindran-Stam](#), [Megan Sherman](#), [Heather Yee](#), [Natara Loose](#), [Martha A. Delaney](#), [Miranda D. Vieson](#), [Ying Fang](#) | [AUTHORS INFO & AFFILIATIONS](#)

<https://doi.org/10.1128/asmcr.00134-25> • [Check for updates](#)

► [Zoonoses Public Health](#). 2008 Oct;5(8-10):470-80. doi: [10.1111/j.1863-2378.2008.01145.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1863-2378.2008.01145.x)

Evaluation of the risks of shedding *Salmonellae* and other potential pathogens by therapy dogs fed raw diets in Ontario and Alberta

[S L Lefebvre](#)¹, [R Reid-Smith](#), [P Boerlin](#), [J S Weese](#)

Affiliations + expand

PMID: 18811908 DOI: [10.1111/j.1863-2378.2008.01145.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1863-2378.2008.01145.x)



Antimicrobial resistance in veterinary medicine

IPC in veterinary medicine

JOURNAL ARTICLE CORRECTED PROOF EDITOR'S CHOICE

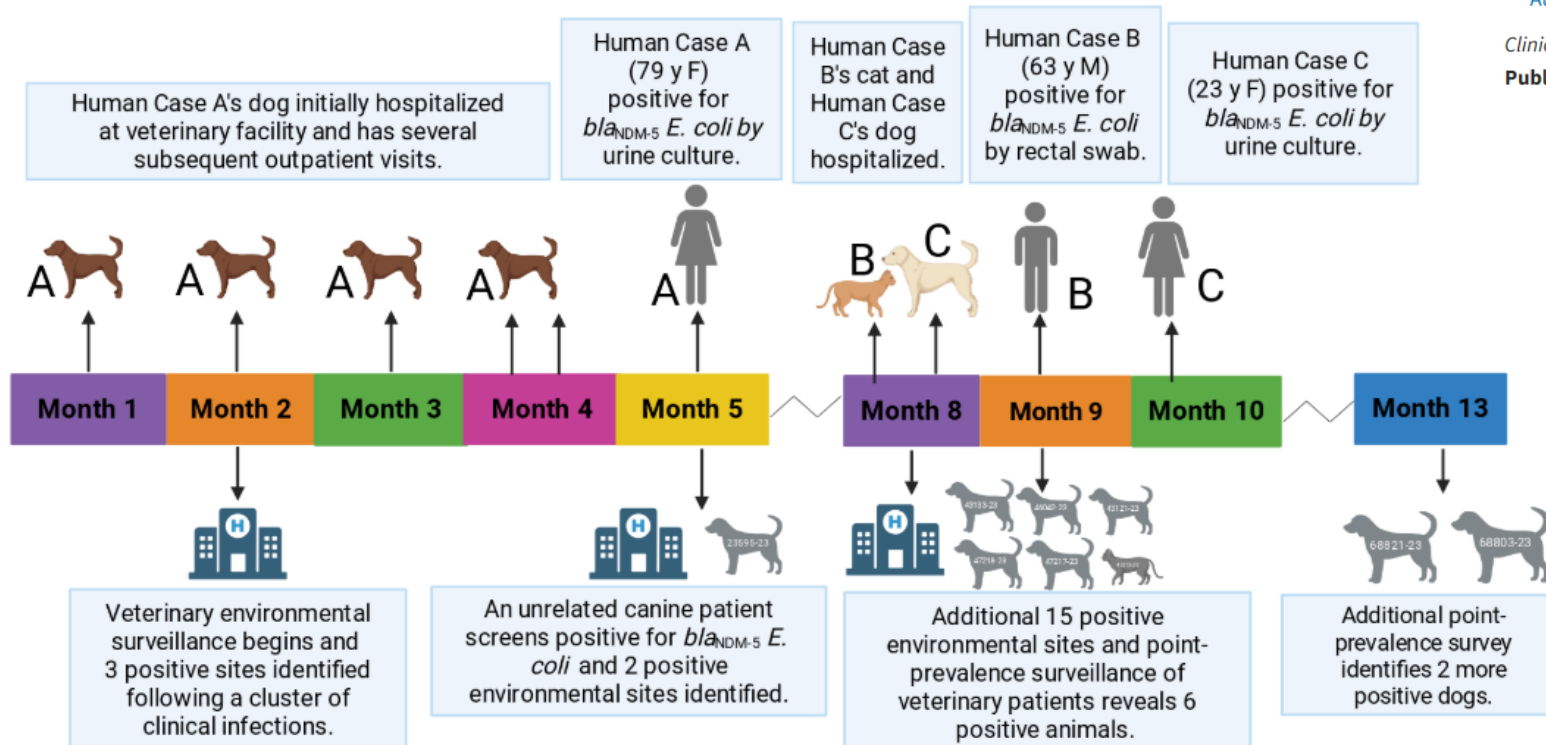
Human Cases of Carbapenemase-Producing *Escherichia coli* Linked to Spread Between Animals and the Environment in a Veterinary Facility—Massachusetts, USA, 2023

Ian M DeStefano, Claire L Fellman, Paula M Snippes Vagnone, Melissa A Cumming, Jennifer L Dale, Abbey Ruhland, Jaclyn Dietrich, Catherine M Brown, Esther Fortes, Nicolas N Epie ... Show more

Author Notes

Clinical Infectious Diseases, ciaf541, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cid/ciaf541>

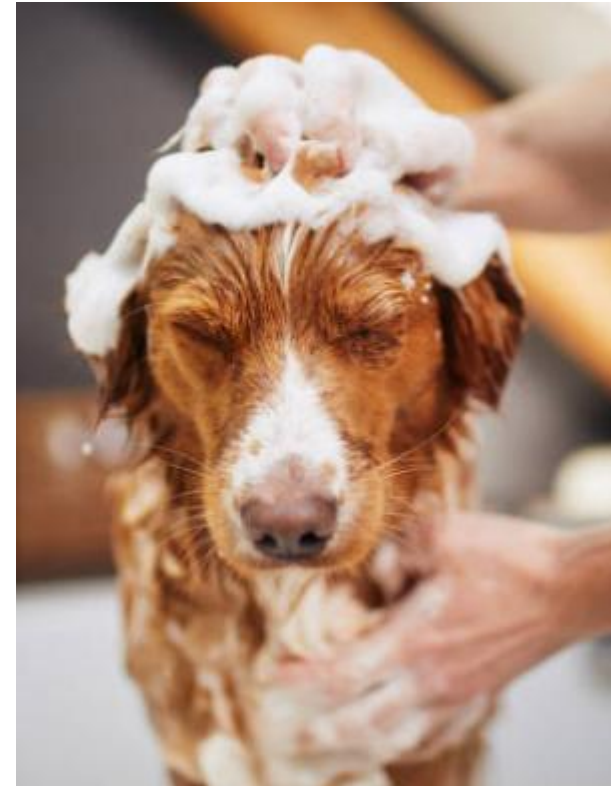
Published: 26 September 2025 Article history ▼



Infection prevention and control

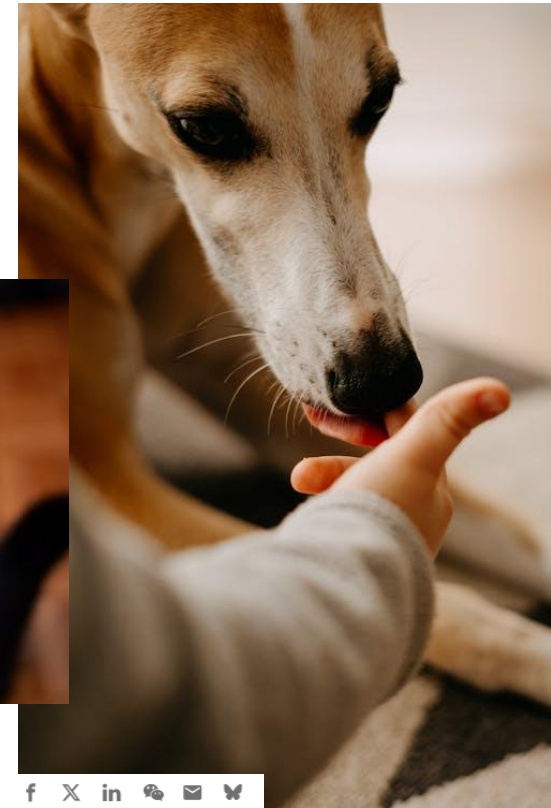
Animal and Trainer IPC

- Trainer-
 - Understanding of need for IPC
 - Follow facility and certification policies
- Routine veterinary care
- Free of acute or chronic illness
- Vaccinated
- Groomed and inspected for parasites within 24 h of visit



Licks (...or bites)

- *Capnocytophaga canimorsus*
- *Pasteurella* spp.
- *Staphylococcus* spp.
- *Streptococcus* spp.



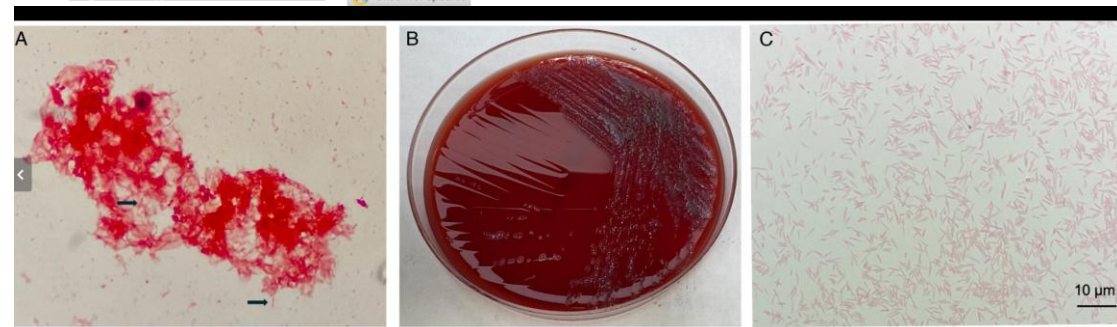
8 | Clinical Microbiology | Case Report | 14 February 2025



“Friends” that come with man’s best friend: *Capnocytophaga canimorsus* sepsis and meningitis in an immunocompromised patient

Authors: Lili Tao, Jeffrey A. Freiberg, Romney Humphries | [AUTHORS INFO & AFFILIATIONS](#)

<https://doi.org/10.1128/asmcr.00085-24> • [Check for updates](#)



Patient IPC

- Hand hygiene before and after petting animal
- Treats to animal?
- No isolation precautions
- Underlying conditions/age-related considerations?
 - Might impact appropriate species



Procedural IPC

- Towel barrier
- No floor based interactions
- Handwashing before and after
- Not allowed to shake or offer paw
- No agitated/violent patients
- Be aware of patient equipment



Facility IPC

- Should have formal written policy
- May restrict animal species
- Infection prevention consult
- Policy for waste cleanup
- Often excluded:
 - Isolation precautions
 - ICU
 - Immunocompromised (definitions varied)
- No admittance to OR, kitchen, pharmacy



Review > Infect Control Hosp Epidemiol. 2015 May;36(5):495-516. doi: 10.1017/ice.2015.15.

Animals in healthcare facilities: recommendations to minimize potential risks

Rekha Murthy¹, Gonzalo Bearman², Sherrill Brown³, Kristina Bryant⁴, Raymond Chinn⁵, Angela Hewlett⁶, B Glenn George⁷, Ellie J C Goldstein⁸, Galit Holzmann-Pazgal⁹, Mark E Rupp¹⁰, Timothy Wiemken⁴, J Scott Weese¹¹, David J Weber¹²

Affiliations + expand
PMID: 25998315 DOI: 10.1017/ice.2015.15

Audience participation

Does your facility allow animal-assisted therapy?



Animals permitted for AAA?

Frequency of veterinary assessment?

Expert guidance


- Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA)

Review > [Infect Control Hosp Epidemiol. 2015 May;36\(5\):495-516. doi: 10.1017/ice.2015.15.](#)

Animals in healthcare facilities: recommendations to minimize potential risks

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Affiliations + expand

PMID: 25998315 DOI: [10.1017/ice.2015.15](#) 

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Questions?

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