

Volunteer Handbook



Open Doors Open Hearts

**Monday through Friday
10:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.
Saturday and Sunday
10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.**

**3839 W. Burnham Street
West Milwaukee, WI 53215**

**(414) 649-8640
(414) 763-6234 (fax)**

www.madacc.org

A Welcome from Our Volunteer & Community Outreach Coordinator

Welcome to the Milwaukee Area Domestic Animal Control Commission (MADACC) volunteer program. We know you have many options as a volunteer, so we appreciate that MADACC is the organization you want to serve.

You will be joining a team of caring and enthusiastic individuals dedicated to the welfare of animals in our community. Whether it is doing laundry and dishes, dog walking, fostering, special events, etc., the work you will do for MADACC has an immediate and tangible impact on the lives of the animals in our care.

– Kathy Shillinglaw

A Welcome from Executive Director

Milwaukee Area Domestic Animal Control Commission (MADACC) is one of the most challenging and rewarding organizations to be a part of in our local animal welfare community.

Each day we are asked to confront animal neglect and abuse, to care for stray and abandoned animals and to do all we can to ensure our animals are given the opportunity to get a second chance at finding a forever family. We cannot do this without the help of our community volunteers. Our staff is so grateful for all that the volunteers do for us and look forward to working with you to provide a better life for the animals at MADACC.

– Karen Sparapani

History

MADACC opened August 1, 1999 to provide animal care and control services for the 19 municipalities (cities and villages) of Milwaukee County, after the Wisconsin Humane Society terminated its contract with the county to provide animal control services.

MADACC is an intergovernmental entity that consists of a Board of Directors with representation from each municipality as well as a seven-member Operations Committee. Under the direction of the Board of Directors, MADACC's Executive Director is responsible for managing the comprehensive animal care and control program for the 19 municipalities in Milwaukee County, with an annual budget of approximately \$3 million and 36 employees.

Mission

To provide animal regulation and care services which protect the health, public safety and welfare of the people and animals in Milwaukee County.

About Us

MADACC is an open-admission animal shelter that currently rescues and assures safe, temporary shelter and veterinary and humane care for more than 10,000 stray, unwanted, abandoned, mistreated and injured animals each year - more than any other animal care and control shelter in Wisconsin.

MADACC provides a central location for owners to find and recover their lost pets, rescues strays and removes dangerous animals from public areas, providing effective animal control services by active enforcement of Wisconsin State Statutes pertaining to animal welfare.

What Does MADACC Do?

MADACC rescues and holds stray (lost pets), injured, sick, mistreated or dangerous domestic animals. We operate a dispatch office to receive complaints of stray animals in the community.

The Wisconsin Humane Society takes injured wildlife and owner surrenders.

What Happens to the Animals?

- Upon admittance, stray animals are scanned for a microchip, given a health exam, dewormed and vaccinated, given food, water and clean bedding.
- Its photograph is posted onto MADACC's website, www.madacc.org, which is updated hourly from 8 a.m. to midnight daily.
- By law, animals are sheltered for a minimum of 4 days.
- If unclaimed after the four-day stray hold, adoptable animals are evaluated for health and temperament and offered to local shelters, breed placement groups, or placed into foster care. Prior to four day hold animals can be evaluated for pre-select adoption or placed in foster care.

- The Pre-Selection Adoption program identifies animals at intake that do not have identification such as a collar or microchip, that are less likely to be reclaimed, and who have an extremely adoptable personality, to be offered for adoption while they are being held on stray hold. Should an owner reclaim the animal, the adoption will be voided and the potential adopter can have a refund or apply the fee to the adoption of another animal. If the owner does not reclaim the animal, the animal will be spayed/neutered and vetted as soon as possible to the first day it came off of stray hold. We do this to make sure as many animals can leave as soon as possible, again, to have resources available for animals that continue to come into our facility.
- MADACC has a full adoption program utilizes traditional adoption procedures or pre-select.

Other Services Offered

- Dog & Cat licensing
- Milwaukee County dog park tags
- Live trap rentals
- Low-cost Spay & Neuter services
- Vaccines
- Microchip identification
- Rabies quarantine (10-day observation period)
- Euthanasia (owner request)
- Safe Keep (ex. owner is arrested, hospitalized, house fire, illegal exotic pets, etc.)

MADACC Fees

Low-cost spay and neuter program: for Milwaukee County residents.

- female dog \$100
- male dog \$90
- female cat \$70
- male cat \$70
- Fix-a-pit \$50

Sign-up for surgeries and services is done on a first come, first serve basis, and must be done in person at MADACC (3839 W. Burnham St., West Milwaukee) before the surgery date. All fees must be paid up-front, at which time a surgery date will be scheduled. No refunds.

Vaccinations: Rabies, Da2PPV and FVRCP \$15 – must be current with Milwaukee County license

Testing: Heartworm and FIV/FeLV \$25 - at time of surgery only

Microchips: \$25

Euthanasia: Provided for owned sick or injured animals - \$100

If a pet dies at home and is brought to MADACC (no pick-ups) - cremation is \$25.



Friends of MADACC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting community awareness and improving the welfare of Milwaukee County's homeless animals.

The vision of Friends of MADACC is to:

- Reunite a greater percentage of lost pets with owners.
- Help more homeless animals find new forever homes.
- Improve quality of life for animals.
- Promote community awareness.
- Control pet overpopulation.

If you are interested in volunteering for Friends of MADACC, please email them at friends@madacc.org.



The Cats' Voice, a MADACC volunteer group, was established on March 9, 2011. The Cats' Voice is dedicated to providing and promoting the health and stabilization of area cats. They provide education to the community on key topics related to cat health and welfare through seminars, materials and an email help line. They also organize on-site adoption events in the MADACC conference room. If you are interested in volunteering for The Cats' Voice you can email them at catsvoice@madacc.org.

Volunteering at MADACC

The MADACC volunteer program operates on a system with three levels. We do this so that volunteers become familiar with shelter protocols, and responsibilities increase as you progress.

We ask that volunteers commit to a specific position and shift for a minimum of 6 months. This is because of the training required, and more importantly, the animals depend on you!

Community Service hours must all be completed under the Animal Care Assistant Position. Community Service volunteers are encouraged to move on to other positions and keep volunteering after service is complete.

Tier 1: (Tier 1 Training and 1-3 hours logged)

Animal Care Assistant

Purpose: Assist shelter staff in maintaining a clean and sanitary environment for the health and comfort of the animals in the shelter.

Responsibilities: Animal Care Assistants assist the Animal Care Attendants with cleaning and sanitizing all food bowls, water bowls, litter pans, white boxes, and laundry. Other tasks may include sweeping, mopping, cleaning windows and emptying garbage.

Qualifications: Ability to follow specific cleaning protocols; ability to bend, lift, reach, and stand for long periods of time; must adhere to all rules and standards set forth by MADACC.

Training: Volunteer Orientation; Tier 1 Training

Scheduling: 2 hours shifts

Tier 2: (select from the following after Animal Care Assistant training and service complete)

Greeter Escort Position

Purpose: Assist Client Service Representatives by initiating contact with incoming clients and providing basic direction to clients

Responsibilities: Greeters/Escorts greet incoming clients and ascertain the needs of clients in order to direct them to the appropriate staff. Greeters/Escorts will provide owners searching for lost animals with a “lost card” and will escort owners through the kennels to look for a lost animal. They will also review the “Tips and Tricks” for locating lost animals with owners. Greeters/Escorts will also provide basic information about MADACC services to clients.

Qualifications: Ability to stand for long periods of time; must adhere to all rules and standards set forth by MADACC.

Training: Volunteer Orientation; Tier 1 Training

Scheduling: 2 hours shifts

Community Outreach Volunteer

Purpose: Big heart for animals but short on time? MADACC needs friendly, outgoing, animal-loving people to represent MADACC at fairs, festivals and farmer markets throughout the year around Milwaukee County.

Responsibilities: Community Outreach Volunteers answer questions about the work we do at MADACC, hand out educational materials, and tell people about our programs and upcoming events. This position is a great alternative (or addition) to a weekly volunteer commitment. If you are a student, you'll get great public speaking experience while supporting animals! You will set up or tear down at the end of the shift and are responsible for bringing the COV materials.

Training: Volunteer Orientation, COV training, shadowing sessions. Email Kathy at kshillinglaw@madacc.org

Scheduling: Two to five-hour shifts (you choose events to attend based on a current event schedule) usually on Saturday or Sunday with some weekday opportunities. Time commitment is flexible.

MADACC Volunteer Adoption Counselor

There's only one thing better than seeing pets leave the shelter with their new families, and that's helping to make it happen! If you enjoy working with people and would like to help secure loving homes for MADACC shelter dogs, consider becoming a Volunteer Adoption Counselor! Please note that this position requires direct contact with dogs; those with serious allergies or mobility issues will not be a good fit for this volunteer opportunity.

Responsibilities: Actively reaching out to and interacting with the general public, specifically talking with prospective adopters to find out what they are looking for in a pet. Interacting with/getting to know the animals and talking with prospective adopters about them to make the best possible match. Providing high quality customer service to people who visit MADACC. Working with staff and other volunteers to increase adoptions. Photographing adoptions and keep record of positive adoption stories. Helping people through the adoption process, sharing information about animal care and behavior, reviewing adoption applications, interviewing applicants in a conversational way, making decisions to finalize or deny an adoption, and communicating with the applicant in such a manner that maintains a courteous and friendly attitude even when declining a request. Willingness and ability to learn about cat and dog behavior, common issues, and ways to address them in order to make good adoption matches and to keep animals in homes. Assisting with the cleaning of animal areas and equipment as needed, including spot cleaning of animal and public areas throughout the day. Transporting animals, supplies and other equipment to and from off-site adoption areas. Monitoring the health of the animals on an ongoing basis and rapidly identifying any health problems or conditions (medical or behavioral) and immediately reporting it to the supervisor or veterinary technician. Treating all animals humanely, properly, and with compassion at all times, regardless of the situation or circumstance and promoting a humane and caring attitude toward all animals. Maintaining a friendly demeanor and providing good customer service while assisting with adoptions. Working courteously and cooperatively with other staff members and volunteers.

Qualifications: Strong interpersonal skills. The ideal person for this job would be personable, outgoing, patient, professional, and able to get along well with a variety of people. Excellent written and oral communications skills. Affection for animals, concern for their welfare, and a willingness to accommodate animals in the work place. Ability and initiative, working with minimal supervision and direction. Maturity, good judgment and a professional personal appearance. Flexibility, ability to manage multiple tasks. The ability to remain pleasant and calm even in stressful situations. The ability to ask appropriate questions to gather information along with the ability to feel and show empathy for others.

The ability to learn about and understanding each dog as an individual with his or her own personality, bad habits, past experiences, etc. Familiarity with animals, knowledge of animal behavior or experience volunteering or working with a rescue group, humane society, foster care involvement or other animal welfare agency are a plus. Comfort and ability to work with animals of unknown disposition and those who may exhibit medical and other problems.

Training: Volunteer Orientation, Tier 1 Training, Basic Animal Handling/Behavior, Position-specific training

Scheduling: Scheduled shifts, 1-3 pm, 3-5 pm, 5-7 pm, seven days of a week.

Dog Walker

Purpose: Provide resident dogs with at least 15 minutes of exercise a day.

Responsibilities: Dog Walkers will teach basic skills to their assigned dogs, to include: not jumping at the kennel door, sit, waiting at doors, proper greetings when meeting new people, etc. Dog Walkers will also note both positive behaviors and behaviors needing modification on each dog's profile, as well as notify the Veterinary staff of any health concerns.

Qualifications: Experience working with dogs preferred; ability to maintain confidentiality; ability to follow specific dog walking and training protocols; ability to track observable phenomenon via note-taking; patience and understanding of dogs and their behavior; must adhere to all rules and standards set forth by MADACC.

Training: Volunteer Orientation, Tier 1 Training, Basic Animal Handling/Behavior, Position-specific training

Scheduling: Scheduled shifts in the 10-12, 12-4, and 4-7:30 pm.

Kitty Concierge

Purpose: Assist Animal Care Attendants with providing morning water and meals to resident cats and kittens. Monitor the appetite and overall health of the cats and kittens in order to assist the Veterinary staff.

Responsibilities: Kitty Concierge team members will work in the morning before Animal Care Attendants begin cleaning the cat kennels. They are responsible for making sure all cats/kittens have fresh water. They will then prepare meals for all cats/kittens. While the cats/kittens are eating, Kitty Concierge team members will make notations for the Veterinary staff on areas of concern to include: not eating, nasal or eye discharge, scratching or hair loss, etc.

Qualifications: Experience working with cats/kittens preferred; ability to maintain confidentiality; ability to follow specific feeding protocols; ability to track observable phenomenon via note-taking; patience and understanding of cats and their behavior; must adhere to all rules and standards set forth by MADACC.

Training: Volunteer Orientation, Tier 1 Training, Basic Animal Handling/Behavior, Position-specific training

Scheduling: every day 8:00-10:00 a.m.

Cat Attendant (AM) Oak Creek PetSmart

Purpose: Provide for the daily care and needs of resident cats at off-site locations.

Responsibilities: Cat Attendants - AM are responsible for the daily cleaning of cat cages, feeding and watering cats, providing clean litter boxes, providing clean bedding and toys, and basic socialization and grooming as needed.

Qualifications: Experience working with cats preferred; ability to maintain confidentiality; ability to follow specific cat handling protocols; ability to track observable phenomenon via note-taking; patience and understanding of cats and their behavior; must adhere to all rules and standards set forth by MADACC.

Training: Volunteer Orientation, Position-specific training

Scheduling: every day in the mornings (between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m.)

Cat Attendant (PM) Oak Creek PetSmart

Purpose: Provide for the daily care and needs of resident cats at off-site locations.

Responsibilities: Cat Attendants - PM are responsible for the final cleaning each day of cat cages, re-feeding and watering cats, scooping litter boxes, and tidying up bedding and toys. Basic socialization and grooming as needed.

Qualifications: Experience working with cats preferred; ability to maintain confidentiality; ability to follow specific cat handling protocols; ability to track observable phenomenon via note-taking; patience and understanding of cats and their behavior; must adhere to all rules and standards set forth by MADACC.

Training: Volunteer Orientation, Position-specific training

Scheduling: every day in the evenings (between 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.)

Off-Site Adoption Counselor – PetSmart Southridge

Purpose: Adopting out cats and kittens on the weekends at the PetSmart Store

Responsibilities: Transporting and returning cats and kittens to PetSmart on Saturday and Sundays. Care for and socialization of the cats while at the store. Talking about MADACC and informing the public of services and function of MADACC. Collecting donations. Facilitating all adoptions off site!

Qualifications: The ideal person for this job would be personable, outgoing, patient, professional, and able to get along well with a variety of people. Experience working with cats preferred; ability to maintain confidentiality; ability to follow specific cat handling protocols; patience and understanding of cats and their behavior; must adhere to all rules and standards set forth by MADACC.

Training: Volunteer Orientation, Position-specific training

Scheduling: Saturday 9:30-12, 12-4 pm.

Tier C: Specialty

Photographers and Photographers Assistants

Purpose: Provide photos of adoptable animals and photos to replace original intake photos as necessary.

Responsibilities: In teams of two, photographers will produce quality photos of assigned dogs and cats. Dogs will be photographed in areas designated by staff, and cats will be photographed on cat towers in each of the cat wards. Areas and equipment must be cleaned and sanitized between animals.

Qualifications: Experience working with animals preferred; ability to maintain confidentiality; ability to follow specific animal handling protocols; ability to follow specific cleaning and sanitation protocols; must adhere to all rules and standards set forth by MADACC.

Training: Volunteer Orientation, Basic and Advanced Animal Handling/Behavior, Position-specific training

Scheduling: TBD

Spay/Neuter Assistant – interview required

Purpose: Assist Veterinary staff with spay/neuter surgeries for the low-cost spay/neuter program and adoption program.

Responsibilities: Spay/Neuter assistants assist with the check-in of surgery animals, pre-surgery tasks, and monitor the recovery of animals.

Qualifications: Experience working with animals preferred; ability to maintain confidentiality; ability to follow specific animal handling protocols; ability to lift at least 50lbs; ability to work individually and as a team; comfortable with taking direction; patience and understanding of animals and their behavior; ability to follow specific cleaning and sanitation protocols; must adhere to all rules and standards set forth by MADACC.

Training: Volunteer Orientation, Tier 1 training, Position-specific training

Scheduling: Monday through Fridays with surgery 8:00-11:00 a.m., 11:00a.m.- 1 p.m.

Volunteer Policies

Before You Arrive

Volunteers may assist in the facility any time between 10:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. The shelter is closed to volunteers on holidays.

Wear comfortable clothes that you don't mind getting dirty, stained, wet or snagged. You should wear long pants and sturdy, non-skid, closed-toe shoes for your own safety and protection.

If you are pregnant or if you have any condition that might compromise your immune system, you must notify your physician of your intent to volunteer at the shelter. Your doctor may want you to limit or stop your volunteering, or s/he may have medical advice/precautions for you.

We are not responsible for the loss or theft of your personal belongings. Please keep any items of value on your person or locked in your vehicle. You are welcome to keep belongings in the Volunteer Coordinators office.

In The Facility

When you arrive, please sign-in on the clip board at the front desk.

You will then log-in using your pin number (Received at Tier 1 training) on the volunteer computer.

Please wear your volunteer name tag at all times while in the facility.

Volunteers must be polite, courteous and helpful when dealing with staff and the public. Please refer all questions regarding policies and procedures with which you are not familiar to a supervisor or to the Volunteer Coordinator. It is extremely important that the public not be misinformed and that you report any potential conflict to a supervisor.

Please follow all staff directives and do not represent yourself as a MADACC employee.

Any discussion regarding MADACC policies, procedures, and/or activities should be held in private with staff and/or supervisor(s).

Volunteers should not get involved in conflicts between staff and citizens.

Camera phones and other recording devices are not allowed to be used unless permission is obtained from the Executive Director.

MADACC volunteers are ONLY allowed to interact with approved animals after the proper training (dog walking or cat socializing) has been completed. Interacting includes sticking fingers in cages, opening cage doors, petting animals, etc. Any deviation from this policy will result in termination of volunteering at MADACC.

Absolutely NO volunteers in quarantine rooms, treatment area, euthanasia room or the unloading area unless escorted by a MADACC employee.

On Your Way Out

- Return any leashes, signs or other materials to the appropriate areas
- Sign out on the volunteer computer and the front desk clip board

General Guidelines

If a bite or scratch breaks your skin, or any injury occurs, notify a supervisor immediately. If a supervisor is not available, please go to the front desk and ask to speak to a vet tech.

If you suspect an animal is sick or injured, please notify the front desk or a supervisor immediately.

Always wash/sanitize your hands between handling animals in order to reduce the spread of disease.

Sanitation and Disease Prevention

The health of the animals in our facility is a priority. Everyone must follow sanitation guidelines in an effort to minimize disease transmission. The opportunity for animals to be transferred into an adoption program increases when they are healthy. Therefore, it is in their best interest to keep them as healthy as possible. The following are some guidelines to follow regarding sanitation.

- Always wash and sanitize hands between animals. There are hand washing sinks in the break room and bathrooms. There are liquid hand sanitizer dispensers in each kennel room.
- Walk dogs in and out of building following procedures.
- Do not reach into cages to pet animals. This can spread disease.
- Dispose of dog feces in appropriate trash containers. Do not leave any feces on the ground.
- Only occupy volunteer designated areas of the building. Stay out of off limit areas. This is to minimize the spread of disease transmission. The off limit areas are the quarantine rooms, treatment area, euthanasia room, and the unloading area.
- If you observe any illness in an animal please notify the vet tech staff.

MADACC reserves the right to terminate a volunteer's service at any time, with or without warning. The following will result in termination:

- Theft
- Substance abuse
- Being under the influence of alcohol or drugs while on premises
- Having any illegal contraband in your possession while on premises
- Discourtesy/rudeness to another volunteer, staff member or citizen
- Any act of cruelty to an animal
- Careless, negligent performance of volunteer duties
- Altering a kennel card in any way
- Interfering verbally or physically with an employee or member of the public
- Sexual harassment
- Deviating from sanitation/disease prevention guidelines
- Unauthorized photography or audio/video recording in non-public areas of the MADACC building
- Interacting with animals not approved for socialization without explicit authorization from a supervisor
- Disclosure or removal from the premises of confidential MADACC information. Confidential information includes information, in any form, related to MADACC's operations and finances, management, employees, animal owners, animal claimants, animal attack victims, animal euthanasia, animal bite records, animal medical records, animal behavioral records, and similar information, which is not generally known by or readily available to the public. Confidential information also includes any codes, passwords, usernames, or other identification or information necessary to access any of the MADACC's computer files, e-mail accounts, voicemail systems, and other systems and accounts belonging to MADACC.

If you have a problem or question, please talk to the Volunteer coordinator or a supervisor. If neither is available, please go to the front desk and ask to speak with a vet tech.

Smoking Policy

For health and safety considerations, MADACC prohibits smoking in MADACC facilities. If you wish to smoke you may do so outside of the building.

Contact with the media

The Executive Director or designated supervisors shall be responsible for all official contacts with the news media, including answering of questions from the media. If you are approached by a member of the media you may politely refer them to the Executive Director.

Grievances

Any and all complaints regarding MADACC, its employees or its policies will only be accepted if written, signed and given to the Volunteer Coordinator.

Why Does MADACC Euthanize Animals?

Euthanasia is the term used for humanely putting an animal to death. Euthanasia is an unfortunate reality in many shelters around the country, and particularly for open-admission animal shelters and animal control facilities.

MADACC is an open-admission animal control facility. As such, MADACC never turns an animal away regardless of its age, medical condition, breed, physical condition, temperament or the current kennel space available.

MADACC works with over 150 shelters and rescues across the state, with the goal of transferring as many adoptable animals as possible into their adoption programs. In addition, MADACC has a limited adoption program that focus on Pit Bull type dogs and cats. MADACC staff is proud of the fact that every animal is treated as an individual, and they provide the best humane care for every animal that enters the shelter.

Animals may be euthanized at MADACC because they are sick or injured. While their medical condition may be treatable, it may not be financially realistic for us to do so, or the animal's prognosis may be poor. What is treatable for an animal living at home with its owner may not be treatable when the animal is living in a stressful shelter environment. Placing these animals with responsible shelters and rescues with the resources to treat these animals is an option utilized whenever appropriate.

Animals may be euthanized because they possess behaviors that make them poor candidates for adoption. MADACC has a responsibility not only to the animals of Milwaukee County, but also to the people who will be adopting these animals, and the people who share a community with them. We cannot in good conscience adopt out animals that are potentially dangerous, or who have severe problems adapting to change. Our staff is well-versed in animal behavior – while a volunteer may feel that an animal is “fine”, our staff that works with these animals throughout the duration of their stay, may see something that a non-professional could miss.

Sadly, animals are sometimes euthanized because space is tight. The reason MADACC and shelters in general exist is that there are too many animals and not enough homes. This is particularly true for the two most vulnerable pet populations in our communities – Pit Bull type dogs and cats. We do not have a time limit for our animals, but there may be times when we are housing an abundance of a particular type of animal, and we don't have any other options. At that time the animal in the shelter that is deemed the least likely to be adopted (due to age, temperament, illness and other factors) is the animal that will be chosen for euthanasia.

It is very difficult emotionally for our staff to have to make a decision to euthanize any animal, and then to have to perform the procedure. Euthanasia is not taken lightly and it can raise the stress level of the employees a great deal. Volunteers are asked to respect our employees and the difficult decisions they make on a daily basis. We recognize that you may not always understand the reasons as to why an animal was euthanized, but it is highly inappropriate to confront the MADACC staff and make their jobs even more difficult by questioning them or challenging them on a euthanasia decision. You are to consult with the Volunteer Coordinator, Shelter Manager or Executive Director only. Likewise, if you are unsure what has happened to an animal you've gotten to know here, you are not to ask the staff. The reason is simple - if there was an unhappy ending to that animal's story, we don't expect the employees to relive the event for each curious volunteer. It is far too stressful for staff in an already stressful job. Please see the Volunteer Coordinator and you will be given an honest answer and will have the opportunity to discuss your feelings and any concerns you might have.

We also ask that you be very careful and use discretion when discussing your feelings about a particular sad ending with other volunteers. Dwelling on the negative isn't good for anyone's morale and often leads to the spread of inaccurate information as the story gets retold down the line. You will hear of sad endings, but never lose sight of the happy endings. They far outnumber the sad ones. Employees and volunteers should focus on their successes and be proud that what they're doing is ensuring more pets are finding their forever homes.

Zoonotic Diseases

Worker Safety in the Animal Shelter*

Zoonosis

Zoonosis is the term used to describe diseases that can be passed from animals to humans and vice versa. This is an issue of special importance to staff who work in animal shelters because of the unknown background and high incidence of disease in shelter animals. Veterinary staff who work in animal hospitals, zoos and laboratories, for example, know more about the medical history of their patients than shelter workers dealing with large numbers of stray animals on a daily basis. There are at least 200 known zoonotic diseases, and more are being continually added to the list. Fortunately for most shelter workers dealing mainly with dogs and cats, the list of zoonotic diseases to be concerned about is much shorter than 200. The good news is also that most of these diseases can be avoided or their impact minimized by following a few straightforward rules.

The single most effective thing you can do to avoid contracting a disease from an animal or from the shelter environment is to

ALWAYS WASH YOUR HANDS AFTER HANDLING ANYTHING.

In addition, make certain to wash before handling any food or putting your hands in your mouth or up to your face and eyes.

Most diseases are spread through the oral route or by penetration through breaks in the skin or mucus membranes. This one simple step of hand washing will prevent the spread of most diseases by avoiding the route of infection. This is not fool proof, however, as some disease organisms can penetrate intact skin or are inhaled.

Other precautions:

- Wear gloves when cleaning and disinfecting cages, food and water bowls, litter pans, etc. This is especially important if you have any open wounds on your hands and arms. Wash your hands after removing the gloves. There may have been a break in the gloves.
- Seek prompt medical attention for any scratches, bites or wounds received on the job.
- Use gloves and the proper equipment when handling dangerous animals to avoid injury.
- Wash and disinfect any wounds received immediately and seek professional attention.
- Avoid self-treatment.
- Wash hands using iodine based disinfectant soaps.
- According to the CDC, in order to wash ones' hands properly, hands should be lathered and rubbed together vigorously for at least 10-15 seconds, and then rinsed thoroughly under a forceful stream of warm water.
- Avoid eating food in areas where animals are housed or treated.
- Avoid letting animals lick your face or wounds.
- Pregnant women should avoid cleaning litter boxes because of the risk of contracting Toxoplasmosis. The risk is actually minimal and most cases of Toxoplasmosis are not transmitted to humans from cat feces, but from ingestion of contaminated or

undercooked meat. Prompt daily cleaning of the litter box disposes of fecal material before it becomes infective. However, to be on the safe side, this duty should be assigned to others.

- If you do become ill, let your physician know that you work with animals.
- If you don't know if a disease or condition is zoonotic or not, assume that it is and treat it accordingly. Wear gloves and masks, isolate the animal, wash hands, and DISINFECT, DISINFECT, DISINFECT!
- It should always be remembered that most people who work with or own animals do not contract any of these diseases. The people most at risk are the elderly, young children and people who are immune-compromised, such as HIV patients or people taking immunosuppressive drugs. The rewards obtained from the human animal bond far outweigh the risks of becoming ill from contact with animals.
- It is important to recognize the signs that an animal is sick. Some signs are more obvious than others. Important symptoms of disease may include: Depression, pale gums, loss of appetite, dehydration, fever, vomiting, diarrhea, ocular and nasal discharges, reddened eyes, hair loss or reddened skin, shaking the head, coughing, sneezing, lethargy, straining to urinate or defecate, blood in the stool or urine, lumps or swellings, penile or vaginal discharges, neurological problems like star gazing, head tilt, head pressing, seizuring, etc.
- Diseases are transmitted by a number of mechanisms. Most diseases are either caused by bacteria, parasites, viruses, or fungi (the causative agent of ringworm) and are transmitted by the fecal-oral route or through breaks in the mucus membranes or skin. Staff should understand the modes of disease transmission in order to keep themselves healthy and safe.
- The most commonly encountered diseases are caused by direct contact with infected tissues, aerosolized particles, contaminated feces, urine or saliva, or through contact with grooming utensils, etc. Fomites are one of the most common ways diseases are transmitted and one of the most overlooked mechanisms. They are particularly dangerous when dealing with viruses or fungi that can survive in the environment for long periods of time and are resistant to routine disinfecting techniques.

*Dr. Lila Miller, DVM, Sr. Director. Animal Services & Vet Advisor, ASPCA. Worker Safety in the Animal Shelter, April 20, 1990. (<http://www.petfinder.com/for-shelters/worker-safety-animal-shelter.html>)