

# You're sick? See a vet!

Do you keep coming down with a sore throat, tummy upset or skin infection? Have a look around your home. See a family pet? If you do, that could be the source of your infections.

A 1983 October issue of *Omni* described how Dr Cooperman, a children's doctor (paediatrician), became suspicious when he had repeatedly treated a family of seven children for sore throats. No matter what treatment he prescribed, the sore throats would not go away. He had given courses of antibiotics, which should have done the trick.

In desperation he took a swab of the family pet's throat and sent it off to a laboratory to be tested and checked. It was discovered that this was the source of the recurring infection. The bacteria, streptococci (commonly called *strep*), was quite content to grow in the dog's throat.

There are about twenty different types of streptococci. Don't panic! Many of these are with us all the time—in our mouth and gut. One of the less acceptable ones lives in people's mouths and causes dental problems—holes in teeth, or caries. This can keep dentists busy.

Even after the strep has been treated in the mouth it can cause diseases that damage the heart valves. Not all streptococci are harmful. Most sore throats are not due to the bacteria.

Dr Cooperman investigated other families that had continual sore throats. He found most had family pets, many with throat infections. These included the family dog, cat and bird. If you have recurring infections of the throat you might have a think about how close you get to Spot, Tiddles or Tweetie Pie.



Then there are infections from common parasites and fungi. Young pets are common carriers of parasites, like roundworms. Roundworm eggs can easily pass from pets to people through the mere handling of an infected animal.

Skin diseases that can be transferred from pets to people include ringworm, which is caused by a fungus—not a worm. Ring-shaped skin sores come from contact with fungus on an animal's skin.

Fleas are blood-sucking insects that feed on pets, bite humans and can jump as far as 30 to 40 cm. Female fleas begin laying eggs within two days of their first blood meal and can lay as many as 200 eggs in days. They cause scratching and allergic reactions in humans.

Infected by your pet? You don't have to go to a vet—your doctor can still treat you! And don't kiss your pets!

Sources: *Pets and Human Illness*, University of Cincinnati, Case Wellness Reserve, 2004, and 'Your Pet Can Infect You', *Science Bizarre* by Dr Karl Kruszelnicki, ABC Enterprises, 1986.