

It's January, so it must be time for the top ten veterinary questions of the past year. These are neither the most common nor most intriguing issues in veterinary practice but rather just ten common topics that seem to get a lot of attention in my daily work.

1) When can I safely take my new puppy out to the park?

Taking your new puppy everywhere you go seems like a great way to help him or her develop comfort and confidence with other people and animals, and in many ways teaching a dog good "social skills" is as important as providing good nutrition and medical care. But public places (public parks, "dog" parks, the Water Front, etc) are also possible sources for infectious diseases-such as parasites and the dangerous Parvo Virus. We recommend avoiding public places until about 2 weeks after the 4-month puppy vaccination is given. This 4-month vaccination should be part of a series of vaccinations starting at 6-8 weeks of age. Keeping your puppy out of public places doesn't mean isolating him/her. Allow your pup exposure to people of all ages (friends and family) and to dogs that you're sure are gentle, healthy and well vaccinated.

2) Why does my cat keep getting tapeworms?

Cats (and dogs as well) get the common tapeworm by only one route-ingesting fleas. Fleas, as well as your pet for that matter, are required for the Tapeworm to complete its lifecycle. If your pet has tapeworms you might see small pale "sesame seed"-like structures stuck to your pet's hair in the anal area. A pet that seems to get a lot of tapeworm infections likely needs some flea control as well. Talk with your veterinarian about Advantage® or Frontline®, these products work great for most pets.

3) Is this lump on my dog serious?

We're often asked about lumps and bumps on pets. Simply stated, any new or persistent lump on your pet should be checked by your veterinarian. Ultimately a needle aspirate or biopsy may be needed to tell you if its concerning or not.

4) Can the feline AIDS virus infect people?

To date I know of no scientific evidence to suggest humans can be infected by the Feline Immunodeficiency Virus. The same is true for the Feline Leukemia Virus.

5) How much should I feed my dog?

I've come to the conclusion that we pet owners overfeed our pets. I'm not sure if this is because dog food labels overestimate our pets' caloric needs, or as a group just we just like to watch animals eat. I recommend that pet owners never feed more than that recommended on the pet food label and many times I recommend feeding considerably less.

6) Do cats always land on their feet?

Cats do have a remarkable righting mechanism that allows them to orient their bodies so that they so often land on their feet. The problem is, if falling from a high place, the rest of their body "lands" as well and this can, and often does, result in serious injury. Falls from high places are common and some have coined the term "High-Rise Syndrome" for urban felines who have fallen out of high-rise apartment windows.

Common areas of injury from falls include broken legs, head/jaw injuries, and most worrisome is the hidden internal injuries. Prevention is the answer here. If possible don't let your cat lounge where it might fall more than a few feet.

7) How can my dog have fleas- it's wintertime?

Fleas seem to know no season. It always "flea-season" in our area. Granted we see more fleas in the warmer months, but rest assured pets are bothered by these pesky parasites year round.

8) My older dog has a gray haze in his pupils; does he have cataracts?

As dogs age they may develop a benign abnormality in the lens of the eye called nuclear sclerosis. Instead of the pupil of the eye looking black it will have a grayish haze that many people mistake for a cataract. This is not a cataract and should not affect your pet's vision. It's best to have your veterinarian, or even a veterinary ophthalmologist (see the next question) check things out to be sure.

9) Are there really cardiologists for animals?

Yes! There's also dermatologists, internists, ophthalmologists, oncologists, orthopedic and soft tissue surgeons, neurologists, radiologists, and emergency and critical care specialists. A pet's never had better medical options.

10) Is canned food better than dry food for my pet?

A pet food's moisture content has little to do with its nutritional value. And moisture or water content is the major difference between canned and dry food. The typical canned food is about 70-80% water. Canned foods may be a bit more palatable but they're also less economical, may promote more rapid development of dental disease, and the empty can needs to be thrown out or recycled. The choice between canned or dry food should be one of pet or owner preference rather than one of nutritional superiority.

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