

Zoonotic Diseases Associated with Free-Roaming Cats

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Summary

Free-roaming cat populations have been identified as a significant public health threat and are a source for several zoonotic diseases including rabies, toxoplasmosis, cutaneous larval migrans because of various nematode parasites, plague, tularemia and murine typhus. Several of these diseases are reported to cause mortality in humans and can cause other important health issues including abortion, blindness, pruritic skin rashes and other various symptoms. A recent case of rabies in a young girl from California that likely was transmitted by a free-roaming cat underscores that free-roaming cats can be a source of zoonotic diseases. Increased attention has been placed on trap–neuter–release (TNR) programmes as a viable tool to manage cat populations. However, some studies have shown that TNR leads to increased immigration of unneutered cats into neutered populations as well as increased kitten survival in neutered groups. These compensatory mechanisms in neutered groups leading to increased kitten survival and immigration would confound rabies vaccination campaigns and produce naïve populations of cats that can serve as source of zoonotic disease agents owing to lack of immunity. This manuscript is a review of the various diseases of free-roaming cats and the public health implications associated with the cat populations.

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