



Western Ringtail Possum

Hygiene and Zoonoses

Fact Sheet 4

Ringtails can carry disease and knowledge of the organisms and pathogens they may naturally harbour is limited.

Zoonotic disease: disease that can be transmitted through contact with an animal

Anthroponotic disease: disease acquired by an animal from contact with a human

Infection is possible through ingestion (hand to mouth) or aerosol (airborne) contamination as well as bites or scratches.

However infections associated with handling ringtails are rare – unless you are a vet performing necropsies.

The role of possums in the epidemiology of diseases that affect humans is quite unknown. The elderly, children and immunocompromised people are at greatest risk.

Personal hygiene

Basic principles of personal and equipment hygiene minimise any risk for the carer and the risk of spreading disease to other animals.

Avoid being bitten or scratched, however if it happens remember that teeth and claws can be contaminated with potential pathogens.

If your skin is broken infection can occur.

Clean wound with running water to flush it out, then use a mild antiseptic solution and cover it with dressing.

For deep wounds a doctor should be consulted.

Keep your Tetanus vaccination current!

Salmonella (transmission by ingestion), Ringworm (fungus infection – cats are common carriers!) and Sarcoptic mange (mite, transmission by direct contact – very itchy rash) are probably the threats we should be most aware of when handling possums.

Wash your hands

- before you handle the animal, its food, bedding etc
- after handling of animals or anything that was in contact with them and could be contaminated
- between animals

Wear gloves when cleaning cages of faeces and urine.

Other health considerations

If you should fall ill and a diagnosis is difficult, tell your doctor that you engage in wildlife care.

If you should be pregnant, get advice from your doctor before taking on wildlife.

Domestic animals and wildlife have different diseases or can transmit parasites or disease to one another; keep them strictly apart at all times.

If you use rodent or insect control, make sure that your possum (or equipment used with it) does not come in contact with any poison.