

WHY YOUR CAT SHOULD ALWAYS BE KEPT INDOORS



Like many cat lovers, you may have thought about letting your cat venture outdoors. A lot of cat owners feel guilty about keeping their kitties inside and worry that they are depriving them of their natural instincts or fresh air and sunshine. If you have experienced some of these feelings, let's look at the issues surrounding outdoor cats.

HEALTH ISSUES

DISEASE

The American Feral Cat Coalition estimates that there are approximately 60 million feral and homeless stray cats living in the United States. Many of these cats carry diseases and illnesses that can be passed on to your cat through contact. Other diseases can be contracted directly from the environment. A number of these diseases can be serious or potentially fatal. Common examples include:

- **Rabies**
- **Feline Leukemia (FeLV)**
- **Feline AIDS (FIV)**
- **Feline Herpes (FHV)**
- **FIP (feline infectious peritonitis)**
- **Feline Distemper (panleukopenia)**
- **Upper Respiratory Infections (or URI).**
- **Bacterial and Fungal Infections**

PARASITES / WORMS

Several common parasites can be picked up by your kitty when he or she ventures outdoors. These parasites can cause a variety of moderate to severe symptoms, such as scratching, skin infections, hair loss, vomiting and diarrhea. In addition, some of these pests can hitch a ride into your home and infect your family. Parasites can be very difficult to eradicate from your cat and your home. Left untreated, they can cause severe health issues for your cat and may be fatal.

- **Fleas**
- **Ticks**
- **Ear Mites**
- **Intestinal Parasites**
- **Chewing Lice**
- **Mange / Scabies**
- **Heartworm**
- **Round, Hook and Tapeworms**

UNHEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Outdoor cats are subjected to very poor living conditions and are susceptible to many dangers.

- They eat out of trash cans and drink filthy water which can cause a variety of infections and diseases. Some cats eat raw crayfish which can carry deadly parasites.
- Severe weather conditions, such as storms, hurricanes, flooding, and extreme hot or cold temperatures can ultimately kill them.
- Some cats can get stuck in car or truck engines when they are trying to keep warm during cold weather conditions.
- The life expectancy of an outdoor cat is approximately up to 5 years of age while an indoor-only cat can live a long, healthy, and happy life up to 20 years of age.

UNWANTED PREGNANCIES

Many pet owners ignore the importance of spaying and neutering their pets. An intact female kitty can become pregnant as early as four months of age. Cats can get pregnant repeatedly throughout the year, producing a litter of two to eight kittens each time. Failure to spay and neuter contributes to the overpopulation of unwanted homeless cats and kittens within our community. Unfortunately, most will die before reaching adulthood.

SAFETY CONCERNS

SAFETY is a major consideration for cat lovers thinking about letting their cat venture outdoors. Potential hazards that can seriously threaten your cat's well-being and possibly his or her life include:

- **Cars**
Contrary to popular belief, cats do not have the innate instinct to avoid busy streets, and they frequently get hit and killed by cars and other motorized vehicles.
- **Animal Cruelty**
Roaming cats may be at risk for animal cruelty. Cats and kittens end up being trapped and abused for sport or used as "bait" for dog fights. People who hate cats have been known to intentionally discard them and their kittens in dumpsters, torture, drown, poison, beat, or even shoot them.
- **Wildlife**
We may think of our feisty felines with their sharp teeth and claws as good hunters who are capable of taking care of themselves. Cats may be good hunters, but unfortunately, they also often wind up being hunted. Cats are commonly attacked by dogs, coyotes, foxes, bobcats, raccoons, alligators, snakes, birds of prey, and even other domestic felines. Think your fenced-in yard is safe? Coyotes can jump over fences as high as six feet tall! Injuries from wild animal and dog attacks are very serious and often fatal.
- **Toxins and Poisons**
Outside cats also face danger from coming into contact with toxins, such as antifreeze, that are often ingested because they have a pleasant taste. Cats may also end up accidentally exposed to poisons when they hunt and eat rodents that have recently ingested poisonous bait. Contact with poisonous frogs and snakes can also be fatal. In addition, some common outdoor plants, flowers, pesticides and fertilizers are often toxic and deadly.
- **Trees and High Places**
Cats often climb trees or up to high places where they find themselves unable to climb down. In some cases, they may be trapped for days until they become so severely starved, dehydrated, and weak that they fall and suffer severe or fatal injuries.

IT'S THE LAW IN PINELLAS COUNTY

Pinellas County Animal Ordinance Sec. 14-63. - Dogs or cats at large.

(a) No dog or cat shall run at large within the county, as defined under this article. Any person who possesses, harbors, keeps, or has control or custody of any dog or cat which is running at large shall be in violation of this article, regardless of the knowledge, intent or culpability of the owner.

(b) This section shall not apply to police dogs as defined in F.S. § 843.19 when such dogs are engaged by a law enforcement agency in an official capacity, or to any dog which is actually engaged in or being trained for the sport of hunting during a legal hunting season within authorized areas and supervised by the owner.

(c) The owner of any female dog or cat in heat (estrus) which is not kept confined in a secure enclosure, such as a building, veterinary hospital, boarding kennel or closed kennel, such that the female dog or cat cannot come in contact with any male dog or cat, except when the owners of both animals intend to breed such animals, shall be deemed in violation of this article. A fenced area is not sufficient enclosure for the purpose and intent of this subsection.

References

Kress, Steve (2008). *Audubon Living: Cats*. Audubon Magazine, November-December.

Pinellas County Florida website. Retrieved April 17, 2018 from

<http://www.pinellascounty.org/animalservices/code-enforcement.htm>